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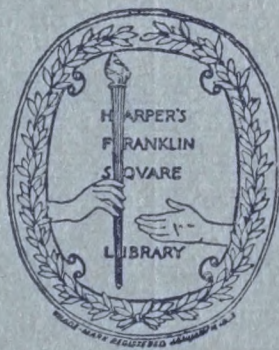
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CUT WITH HIS OWN DIAMOND

A Novel

BY

PAUL CUSHING



NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS


DECEMBER, 1891

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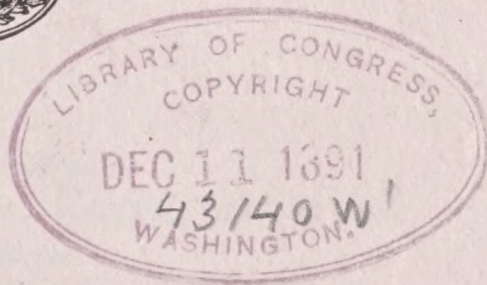
CUT WITH HIS OWN DIAMOND

A Novel

R. A. Wood-Sey

BY

PAUL CUSHING *pened*



NEW YORK

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1891

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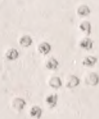
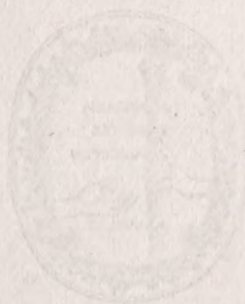
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BY

PAUL CUSHING

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NEW YORK

HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS

1891

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CUT WITH HIS OWN DIAMOND.

Part II.

CHAPTER I.

OF THE BITTERNESS OF A SWEET NATURE.

THE Fellby Bank was easily found, seeing that it stood, gray and solemn, in Lacklandgate, next door to the famous old "Blue Dragon" inn, wherein were quartered some of the men of quality among the Scotch rebels when the Pretender passed through the town. Easily found, also, being known of all the inhabitants of the town, was David Reed, the old bank clerk, who looked as gray and solemn as the long established institution of which he seemed the fit embodiment and visible genius. In that little mysterious world of finance the proprietors showed forth only as strange and honored guests of foreign extraction; even the bank manager appeared little more than a naturalized subject. The one true native was David Reed. When the good folk of Fellby glanced at his honest, shrewd, kindly face, covered with curious lines and wrinkles, they beheld not so much a human countenance as the image and superscription of one of the highly respected five-pound notes which the bank had the proud privilege to issue.

But it was not easy for a stranger to find the home of David Reed; like a lark's nest in a field of standing corn, it was hidden away almost in the middle of the town. A hundred and fifty yards along Lacklandgate from the bank one came to Blackstones, a grim old mansion, boasting a couple of huge black chim-

neys, funnel-shaped, like potters' ovens. Round the corner was a long, narrow street, paved with broad flat stones whereon the urchins spun their tops all day long in summer, and down the middle of which all day long in winter they were sliding. On the side adjoining Blackstones there were houses almost as old as the mansion from which they seemed to have sprung; they were very small houses, but clean and in good repair, quaintly dignified, as if conscious that they were survivals of the fittest, representing a sober past to a flippant present. There were no houses on the other side of this street that knew no traffic, simply iron railings, with a green meadow, several feet lower than the flagstones beyond.

A short distance along this street one came to an arched entry in the line of cottages, above which, on a small painted board, ran this legend—"Yard No. 199." Looking up it, there was visible a flight of stone steps foot-worn and dark with age; where they led to it was beyond the wit of any stranger to conceive, though to tread them and find out became an instant necessity of his nature, unless he was of the dull tribe of the incurious, whose imaginations are wrought of lead, not gold. Fifteen of these curiosity-provoking steps there were, and through an old, stout oaken door, set in a limestone wall, they gave on to a small grass-plot neatly clipped, in the middle of which was a summer-house, whence were visible fields and waters, woods and mountains. Between two short steep hedges of holly a flight of seven moss-covered steps led into a little old-world flower-garden, surrounded by a high stone wall, along which stood a ring of lime-trees still trimmed to the fantastic design of an early eighteenth-century fancy. At the far end of the garden was a small cottage with latticed windows, covered from ground to chimney-top with ivy, jasmine, and virginia-creepers. It was a mere nutshell of a place, with three little cupboard-like rooms down-stairs, and the same number up, and was the property of the bank. But it was as pretty as a picture outside, and as sweet as a nosegay inside; it was as retired as a hermit's cell, was within three minutes' walk of the bank, and rent free. This was the home of David Reed.

Here, in the prime of his life, twenty-four years ago, he had brought home his bride, a bonnie lassie from beyond the Border, with a sweet face and a gentle soul. Here she gave birth to her only child, a girl whom we shall know as Janet. Here the young

mother died ere her baby Janet was a month old. Here the stricken husband suffered his grief, his woe, his agony, his desolation of soul; not for a week or a month, but for long, dark years. Here the child Janet lived and thrived, and grew into her father's heart, and expelled in no small degree its pain. Here, one day, by the goodness of God, a revelation came unto him. The man opened his eyes, and beheld his dead wife standing before him in flesh and blood. There was the same soul, gentle, true, sweet, mighty in love. There was the same pure, lovely face; the same soft brown eyes; the same turn of the head, curve of the chin, color and play of the hair. It was her figure, her carriage, her tone of voice. And the man, with swelling heart, stretched out his hands, and murmured in a broken voice, "Come to me, my love."

"Yes, father, darling!"

As he folded his arms round her he said, "Oh, my child, you are the image of your sainted mother!"

Then Janet felt the tears wet on her father's cheek, and she wept also.

For many days after that David Reed lived, well, not exactly in Paradise, but just outside, on the quarter where the dividing hedge was low and thin, so that he saw sights and heard sounds that were quite divine.

So then this little nutshell of a place was veritable holy ground, having witnessed and contained the great mysterious human spirit in its agony and its exultation. Into the cottage, it might well be, something of the human spirit had entered, transforming it into a kind of second body, stationary and mute indeed, but not the less sensitive and sympathetic. Because a thing cannot wink its eyes and wag its tongue and kick out its foot, must it therefore be denied a soul? The woman, working in the darkness, shall produce a thing with a soul. But the man, working in the light, with matter equally vital, shall never by any chance bring forth other than a soulless thing. Herein, truly, is a great mystery, and mystery is to half-knowledge what weariness is sleep.

A hot day early in September had run its course. The horizon above the western fells was still touched with colors, delicate, and fast turning into browns and grays; over the more distant eastern mountains the moon was rising almost full, with a ruddy tinge, like a laggard dressed in the livery of the sun hastening after its

lord. The casement window of the neat little dining-room was open to the garden, an invitation to the coy breeze that was moving about to enter and make itself at home. Close to the ivy beside the open window, and invisible from within, a man stood in a listening attitude. Though the light had left the ground, there was enough of it in the air to reveal the listener as a man anywhere from twenty-five to thirty years of age, having the appearance of a gentleman. A lighted lamp in the room discovered David Reed and his daughter just finishing their tea.

"You look tired, father."

"Stramon Court is a tidy step on a day like this. Four miles there means six miles back, for an old man, Janet."

"An old man! Men are not old at fifty-nine, father."

"It all depends on the man, my child. Men are like their clothes—some wear out quicker than others. Considered as a pair of boots, I'm fit to wear a bit longer, but I am not worth resoling. My uppers are not what they ought to be—not anhydrous."

He tapped his head significantly, and then laughed at his conceit.

"Don't be foolish, father," said Janet, gravely.

David Reed was, in truth, an old man too soon. Within the last year or two the process of breaking up had set in strongly. Together with his physical deterioration, Janet had noticed that his once faultless memory had begun to fail him now and then. The instances were few and trivial, but they were straws showing the set of the current, and they served to render her miserable. For do what she would, she could not expel from her mind the secret conviction that a particular piece of her own conduct had supplied her father with the trouble that, canker-like, was eating away his life before her eyes.

Willingly would she have given her life to save his: which saying, being true, hath a brave sound, and to the ear is full and complete. Women, however, are curious traders, and are given to putting odd values and prices of affection in a manner contrary to all sound common-sense rules of marketing. Janet, a woman, valued her life at something not far below its proper value. Nevertheless, she possessed that which beggared comparison, and made her life exceeding cheap. This valuable article was her love. Would she willingly have given her love to save

her father's life? No; not to save the life of the universe would Janet have betrayed, given up, sold her love. An abnormality? A moral monstrosity? Not a bit of it. Simply a tidy specimen of full-fledged womanhood. That, so considered, the sweet familiar thing seems to grow of a sudden into a creature mysterious and terrible, is small wonder. To live on terms of gentle amity with a creature ever ready to wreck a universe to save a lover, would seem to argue in poor proud males a great presence of mind or a notable absence of imagination. But, after all, is the situation worse than having, willy-nilly, to spend one's life on the outside of a big ball stuffed, not with sawdust or wind, but a surging ocean of fire?

Continued David Reed, "And the hand-bag, Janet—bless me, if I didn't begin to think there was something uncanny in it!"

"What do you mean, dear?"

"Well, of course there was nothing in it but the cases of jewels; and it was light enough when I left Fellby. But, would you believe it? before I reached Stramon Court it grew heavier and heavier, till it felt like lead. If the key, by any misfortune, had been in my pocket instead of at the bank, I believe I should have been tempted to make sure that some wicked spirit had not transformed the precious stones into lumps of lead."

"I must make you some more beef-tea. You are not so strong as you were. Why don't you let Philip go with you, and carry the bag? I am sure he would do it gladly."

"Nay, nay, child. For nearly a dozen years—ever since the Earl was married—I have carried her ladyship's jewels from the bank to the court, and from the court to the bank. Eh, Janet, lassie, but they are a sight to see! I get a sight of them every time her ladyship takes them out of the bag, and puts them back again."

"Are there many of them, dear?" inquired Janet, whose imagination was always fired by the thought of those beautiful gems.

"Nay, it's quality, not quantity. Let me see: there are four bracelets, a wonderful hair-pin, a brooch, a big star with a hundred lights, and a necklace—eh, child, you cannot conceive its beauty. It looks like a great wide collar of diamonds."

"Fit for a queen," ejaculated Janet.

"That's it—fit for a queen."

"They must be worth a great deal."

"You are right there, Janet. Ten to twelve thousand pounds, I'm told by them as should know."

"Oh, my! Fancy walking about the house with all that money-value about you! I should be frightened out of my wits. And yet, no, I should not. I should enjoy it fearfully, if they were all my own!"

Continued the old man, as much to himself as to Janet: "Nay, nay, only David Reed is to be allowed to touch them; that's the condition, you know. And when I go to fetch them back—to stow them away safely for another six months at least as usual—she will give me with her own hand a bonnie new crisp five-pound note for my fidelity. Aye, Janet, but she's a fair, sweet lady is the Countess. Nay, nay, Philip Tuer must never carry 'em. Say, Janet, have you ever told your husband anything about those jewels?"

"No, not a word. You told me that it would not be safe if it became known."

"And I said truth. The two bank partners, the Earl and Countess, and their old butler are the only persons that know anything of the arrangement, except myself and you. Why in the world I ever trusted you with a secret like that I do not know. I've wished many a time I had never told you, since—"

He paused, while Janet gave him a quick glance, and a look of pain came into her pretty face.

"Since when? But, there, you need not tell me. I know. You mean since I was married, two years ago. You date everything unpleasant from then."

"Perhaps I do."

"And therein you are neither kind, father, nor just, either to me or my husband," said Janet, with a sigh.

"I don't blame you, my lass, for sticking up for your husband. I count that your duty. I only wish he were worthy of you," observed David Reed, in a tone that left nothing to be desired in his confirmed pessimism regarding the worth of his son-in-law. Judicially accurate might have been David Reed's estimate of the worth in question, but his utterance of it stamped him as something less than a philosopher. Janet's devotion rose full-armed in a moment.

"He is that, I am sure. And if you would only try to see the better side of him, father—try to like him, and give him a bit of

sympathy and encouragement and fatherly advice—instead of wrapping yourself up in an icy armor of reserve and silence and unworthy prejudice, you would soon see how it would change him. He would—”

“Then you do admit he might change for the better? A while back you wouldn’t admit that. A capital school-master is experience. Under its hard discipline stubbornness relaxes, dulness grows bright, enthusiasm mellows into philosophy, and the block-head blossoms into the gentle scholar, apt, wise, and—and sad.”

The tears were very close to Janet’s eyes as she said, “I am not blind to Philip’s faults, but I try to make allowances for them. And you do not. You multiply them. You magnify them. You forget that—”

“Nay, nay, I forget nothing. I do not forget that Philip Tuer is, by birth, a gentleman, sprung from a family of respectable antiquity; that his father, for services political, was offered a knighthood which, on the advice of friends who would have gladly accepted it themselves, he declined to receive. I do not forget that his father, and most of his friends, have altogether dropped him on account of his marriage with—my daughter. I am only a poor bank clerk, a confidential drudge, on a salary of one hundred and ten pounds a year, after twenty-nine years of faithful service. My employers would write me down a man of ‘unimpeachable integrity,’ of ‘perseverance,’ of ‘industry,’ of ‘clock-like regularity,’ of ‘more than average intelligence.’”

David Reed’s manner and tone of voice became of a sudden so vividly mimetic and irresistibly comical that Janet could not repress her laughter. But it ended quickly in a sigh, and a “Oh, father, why are you so foolish?”

Said he, almost bitterly, “Why foolish? I am not inventing my good qualities. I overheard the senior partner himself so appraise me one day to a gentleman from London. As for Squire Tuer, my forebears were just beginning to go down—they were squires themselves in those days—when his were just beginning to go up. I, David Reed, know as much Greek as the Squire himself—that is to say, none. But my Latinity is, I vow, several degrees less barbarous than his. Nevertheless, I am a criminal, Janet. I have one crime to answer for—I am a poor man. Therefore, think they, your husband did a criminal thing in marrying my daughter. That she is well educated, good, refined, beau—”

Here Janet sprang to her father, put her hand to his mouth, and kissing his brow, murmured, "Don't, dear; please do not. Is Philip to blame for—"

"I was only showing you that my head isn't quite the sieve you thought it was," answered David Reed, withdrawing her hand from his mouth and touching it caressingly, for he loved her exceedingly. But the light of deep excitement still played in his gray eyes, and flashed out from beneath his shaggy brows.

Answered Janet, almost pleadingly, "Yes, father, but you do not remember anything in Philip's favor. You forget that he had just cause for disappointment. He thought—"

Again the passion-stirred man interrupted her, this time with a burst of ironical laughter that made her cringe: "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha! Forget *that*! Ha, ha, ha! Not very likely. It was just like your uncle Jonathan, though he was your poor dead mother's only brother. A queer old stick, a bachelor, rich, wicked, and gouty. Made his money abroad. Keen as a razor in money matters, the old sinner. Came home on purpose, he said, to pet you, his beautiful Singing-bird, as he always called you. Never gave you as much as would lie on a sixpence, but always said, 'Wait till I'm gone, Singing-bird, wait till I'm gone.' Ha, ha, ha!" And David Reed lay back in his chair and laughed till he cried.

Janet left her father's side, and resumed her seat. Her father's mood was strange and startling. The patient, gentle little man, fond of playful humor that imparted often to his speech a flavor that she thought delicious, seemed to be changing into another man right before her eyes. He was equal to the contemptuous, the ironical, the bitter, the passionate, it seemed. Below his sweetness there was rough strength; the deep placid waters of his genial and unambitious content was stirred, and up shot a naked volcanic cone of sheer rebellion and protest. Janet mentally rubbed her eyes and stared, wondering if she was the victim of an illusion. It was like coming across a live Bengal tiger roaming loose in a hazel cover, where one looked only for the whirring partridge and the clucking pheasant and the scuttering rabbit.

David Reed emptied himself of his laughter, born not of mirth, wiped his eyes, and continued, as if it had been an anecdote worth telling: "A month before he dies he calls you in and says, 'Singing-bird, read that.' It is his last will and testament. You

read it. 'To my niece Janet Reed I give twenty thousand pounds in consols free of duty to be paid over to her for her absolute use within six calendar months of my decease.' There it was in black and white, no mistake about it, in proper legal style, without a sign of a comma, or a full stop even, or any of those little fences and boundary marks of punctuation, whereby, in common-sense composition, ambiguity is kept out and comprehension is enclosed, and the wayfaring man though a fool may glean a few simple and plain ideas, and is set up for life as a sage, and the lawyer is left biting his nails, and cursing the whole tribe of commas, colons, semicolons, and periods. Yes, there was no mistake about it. 'Niece Janet' was sitting under the tree of fortune, and the golden fruit swung on its slender stem above her lap. Singing-bird calls to her brave lover, and he comes and sits beside her, seizes her hand, and, cocking his eye to the golden fruit, sighs, 'How I love you!' They coo, and coo, until of a sudden they mate. Oh, the rapture! Oh, the comedy!

"The very next day the dear old uncle dies, for all the world like the good uncle in the play. Then, hey! presto! and the devil appears, as he so often appears, my dear, in the form of a will. It is a will made the very next day after he had shown his 'last will and testament' to his Singing-bird. In it he has left every penny of his money to the trustees of the British Museum, as he says, 'for the purchase of mummies and other bric-a-brac designed for the edification of the British nation.' Ha, ha, ha! Just like him, the gouty, cynical old scoundrel. If he had offered his own yellow shrivelled carcass as a mummy, he would have stood a good chance of being accepted. But — poor Singing-bird! And poor Singing-bird's mate, with his eye cocked on the fruit that swung but never fell! No, Janet, I can see a hole through a ladder yet. I have not forgotten that Philip Tuer married you not for yourself, but for your pelf."

CHAPTER II.

OF A TRAVELLER AT THE PARTING OF THE WAYS.

It is open to question that anything is more galling than to know yourself berated, with no chance of reply, for a piece of conduct that you are ready and willing to defend. Few men, if any, are ready and willing to defend a piece of conduct that is, beyond question, base. And it is presumable that what a man is prepared openly to avow and maintain has, in a measure, the sanction of his conscience, and is at least entitled to rank among those numerous and interesting questions that have "two sides" to them.

It was quite true that Philip Tuer thought he was marrying twenty thousand pounds when he married Janet Reed. Equally true, that without that expectation he would not have married her when he did. That, however, is a different thing from saying that he would not have married her at all. Moreover, wisely or foolishly, he fell in love with her, and won her love in return, while yet she was a penniless girl, unbacked by any brilliant prospect. She loved him with all the strength of her nature, and, by the same token, her honor was absolutely within his keeping. He kept it. He might have smirched her honor, and cast her off, and still have carried his head erect among the only men whose opinion he cared a button for—the men of his class. He did not do this. For pity's sake, do not mistake him for a saint or a hero; he was neither. Before we have done with him, to the cold shoulder we might feel like adding the toe of our boot. But we would not rank among those vulgar multitudinous daubers who furnish the ever-current illustrations of the maxim that the devil is not so black as he is painted.

Leaning against the ivy in the garden, close beside the open casement, Philip Tuer caught every word of the conversation within. He rather enjoyed it, too, for he was not deficient in humor. But when David Reed made his dead-set at the motive of his

marriage, Philip Tuer became utterly disgusted, and not a little wroth. With a shrug of his shoulders he moved quickly and lightly away.

So that he did not hear Janet as she answered, with a curious tension in her voice, "There you are wrong, and wrong him. He married me because he loved me. That he thought I should have money, is true. What was there wrong in that? What peculiar virtue is there in poverty that it should be made the test of sincerity in love?"

She looked altogether beautiful and womanly as she struck out thus bravely, on behalf of her husband, with her interrogative club. As for David Reed, he dodged the club, and got in a cruel thrust of the steel.

"Would he have married you, I should like to know, but for the 'last will and testament?'"

"I do not know. But I am afraid he would."

"Afraid! Why afraid?" this in huge and genuine surprise.

"Because it would have been wrong of him to tie himself for life to a penniless girl."

"Indeed! So you think you were not good enough for his wife without the added virtue of shekels? The idol must be gilded to be worthy of worship, eh? You are a very modest young woman, Janet, very humble, indeed."

"You know well enough, father, that I do not mean anything of the kind. Is it right for a man to marry a girl with no means of supporting her? To hear you talk one would think Philip was a mechanic, who had only to shoulder his tools and go out and get a job."

"Whereas he is only a gentleman of blighted prospects, with expensive tastes, and an income not quite large enough to meet the demands of his tailor. He has an Oxford degree, and an extensive knowledge of gay life, but he can't earn a sixpence. And what is worse—he has no desire to."

"No desire to!" exclaimed poor Janet, into whose eyes had crept a light dangerously akin to that which burned almost fiercely in her father's. "No desire to! Do you think, then, that he is happy living this kind of life? Every mouthful of bread he eats is your bread. Do you think he does not taste the salt in it? What can he do? If he had only a few hundred pounds, and could go up to London, he would soon get a respectable position as—"

"As a director of the great company of makers of coal out of gas. Or a partner in a new firm of literary lead floaters. Meanwhile twice has he had a chance of a clerkship—once in the bank, and another time in the office of Jakes & Petto, wholesale and retail seed-merchants. These he put from him with the disdain of a duke, with a levity that almost justifies your uncle Jonathan and the 'purchase of mummies and other bric-a-brac.' I think had I been in his place I should—"

"Sh—h—h!" exclaimed Janet, with a gesture, "I think he is coming in."

The words were hardly spoken when the door opened, and Philip Tuer entered. There was no sign of a hoof visible, nor was there smell of brimstone about him, nor any mark of budding horns upon his head. Were Satan to appear in flesh and blood on the earth, there is little room for doubt that, in these latter days, he would elect to disguise himself in the similitude of an English gentleman, as being, perhaps, the least vulgar of modern types, and best adapted for surprise and success. Not on that account would it be fair, however, to insist on every English gentleman furnishing the authorities with proofs that he was no Satanophany.

As Philip Tuer lounged easily into the little sitting-room he showed small sign of being the Satanist which David Reed credited him with being. He had a fine, long, delicately-chiselled face, with light-brown hair and deep blue eyes. In stature he was above the average, and in figure he was well-built, and showed the effects of an athletic training. He was dressed in a knickerbrocker suit of tweed of a dark mixture; he held a fishing-rod in his hand, and over his left shoulder was swung his creel. That he was a gentleman was as obvious as that he was a handsome man. For weal or woe, it did not seem possible to make of him a seedsman's clerk.

Looks are one thing, manner is another thing. The handsomest man I ever put eyes on was a day-laborer, a common hedger. He was beautiful as Absalom, a king's son, and like as not had royal blood in his veins, for there is a lot of it under the hedge-rows of Old England. But—and this is the point—his looks did not betray him, did not shame him, did not antagonize the man and his environment. Strangely handsome he was, but why not? Must a hedger be ugly?

With manner it is not so. You thrust a noble manner into an ignoble situation, and instantly all the world is agape at the incongruity. According to their breed some will grin, and some will sigh, but none will be indifferent. A man stood on a curb-stone in New York hawking lead-pencils from a tray in front of him, suspended by a strap round his neck. I bought of him, and then retired within an adjoining store to watch him. He was a gentleman, down on his luck, indeed, but still a gentleman. It was all in his manner, but it was all there, and there was no mistaking it. But—and this is the point—his manner did betray him, did shame him, did antagonize the man and his environment. Good looks never yet did hinder a man from turning his hand to any kind of honest labor. But manner, and the consciousness of it, have been the ruin of many a man; instead of concealing, they have exposed him, advertised him, given him away.

With rod in hand, or with gun under his arm, or astride of a horse, Philip Tuer felt in his element, and, what is another thing, looked in his element. This he knew. Plenty of folk think they also would look well in combination with gun or horse. The chances are they are mistaken. Philip Tuer pictured himself kicking his heels on a high stool, with a pen behind his ear, and his fingers ink-stained. "I should look and feel like an ass," he soliloquized. And he was not far wrong. He had the manner of the club, the drawing-room, the ball-room, the hunting-field, to perfection. But the manner of the seedsman's office was not his. This was not a fault, but it was a misfortune. And in our little home-farm misfortune croft is ever the acre fullest of seeds and weeds, and from it we gather the ripest harvest, be it the virtuous grain or be it the vicious thistle.

Since his marriage Philip Tuer had altered for the worse. A look of defiance had come into his eyes and remained there. His face had lost its happy, careless expression, and had gathered an air of sternness. He looked more resolute, more self-reliant, but at the same time he grew the lines of bitterness and cruelty. To his self-knowledge he had become a new man, and the old was better. Circumstances had forced in him the growth of the seeds of evil; for, like the soil from which we spring, our common humanity is chock-full of all kinds of seeds, awaiting their opportunity to spring up and glorify us, or choke us.

His father, who had carefully trained him in cultivated idleness

and inability, cast him off almost without a shilling; his friends cut him dead; this because he had married a girl with the one defect of poverty. He had been driven to live with, and upon, his wife's father, who misjudged him at the start, mistrusted him, disliked him with all the vigor and obstinacy of class prejudice and contempt. The "mummies and other bric-a-brac" trick was another evil circumstance, with far-reaching effects. He tried a hundred ways to raise money to carry him out of England, to some colony where it was no shame to work and no crime to be poor. Thus far, however, he had failed. As for the Jakes & Petto clerkship, that stared him always in the face like a smug and sniggering demon, he thrust it from him with full-blooded rebellion and hatred.

"Never!" he said, "never! I will drive a coal-cart first. I will break stones on the high-road. But, by Heaven, the governor shall never say that I took his advice, when he said to me, 'From this day forward I have nothing more to do with you. You have disgraced your family. Go and become a clerk, like your worthy father-in-law!'"

A man that was a man would have broken through, or vaulted over, this ring-fence of adverse circumstance. Would he? Are circumstances never too strong for any but the idle, the timid, or the weak? This is not the doctrine of the strong men, who have fought and won and know the strength of the enemy. It is rather the brave saying of such as have been pillowed round and buttressed up by the kind offices of Fortune until they think they stand by their own strength. Bit by bit Philip Tuer grew desperate, then reckless, then cruel, then wicked. He gathered his strength, and rushed the fence of adverse circumstance, carried it, and found himself—where? For there is the pleasant garden of prosperity, goodness, and morality on one side. On the other side there is a deep valley, there are dark woods, and bleak moors beyond; and beyond, sandy wastes; and beyond, mountains sky-high, black, terrible—the land of the lawless and the disobedient, where lie the graves of the lost. These things are a parable.

Leaning against the ivy by the open casement, with hearing ears and spirit dipped in gall, Philip Tuer saw as in a flash a scheme of things that sent the blood tingling through his veins. He saw how he could rush his circumstances, and though it made him go

hot and cold by turns, he said to himself, "I will do it—I will do anything rather than endure this dog's life any longer."

Five minutes later he went in and faced his wife and her father with a calm face and a quiet manner that betrayed nothing of the fearful resolve that he had just made. Janet met him with a glad smile and a sweet kiss.

"Well, dearest, and what luck have you had?" she inquired, as she took his rod in her hand.

"Oh, my luck all over—bad. I worked hard for five hours, and this is the result," he answered, holding up a lovely carp.

Cried Janet, "What a beauty! What is it?"

"This is what Piscator calls the queen of rivers—a stately, a good, and a very subtle fish. It is a carp from Badger Pond. It cost me more patience and guile than it is worth. Mr. Reed, why don't you go in for fishing? 'Tis the poor man's sport, and the wise man's recreation. It is good for dyspepsia, for meditation, for the liver, for observation of nature, for humors ill and well of all kinds."

"It isn't every one who can command his own time, son-in-law, like you," answered David Reed; and the flavor of vinegar was on his tongue.

"You could find time for that out of business hours," said Tuer, indifferently, dropping into a chair.

"Then why cannot you? You make a business of it, and do nothing else."

For a moment Philip Tuer opened his eyes in huge astonishment, while the blood rushed to his face and neck. This was a new departure on the part of the old man, who hitherto had kept his tongue from insolence. Tuer's gorge rose high, but something, perhaps the recollection of his late resolve, calmed his anger quickly. With a light laugh and a bitter smile he answered, "Which shows that I am naturally industrious. Having nothing else to do, I make a business of pleasure. It is admitted to be the best kind of work."

The old man was certainly off his balance to-night. He squirmed in his chair like a worm at Tuer's remarks. In a sharp, falsetto voice, the note of passion, he began, "When I was a young man—"

Broke in Tuer with—"The world was considerably younger than it is now; and, by the same token, not so wise. As a young

man, Mr. Reed, I have no doubt you made a pleasure of your business, eh?"

Shrilled David Reed, "Yes, son-in-law, I did. I was not afraid of work, or above it, or below it. I—"

"And doubtless that is the secret of your success. For you have succeeded, I believe?"

At this the little gray man grew white with passion, rose to his feet, and crossed the room. At the door he turned and said, in a voice that shook with passion, "Anyway, I earned my bread, sir, and I made a home for my wife."

Then he went out and rendered his exit vulgar by slamming the door after him.

CHAPTER III.

OF PHILIP TUER'S STRONG DILEMMA REGARDING CLERKLY STYLE.

PHILIP TUER laughed gayly as David Reed made his undignified exit.

"That was meant for a Parthian arrow, but it was a crack on the skull with a good, honest English club. Do you know, wife, I like your father more and more. He improves on acquaintance. He is so patient, so fair-minded, so free from prejudice, so sweet-tempered, withal, so antiquated, so—"

"Philip, it is not kind of you. What in the world should we do but for his kindness, his hospitality? Nay, do not frown, love. Be yourself. Be just, if you cannot be—"

"Nay," laughed Tuer, bitterly, "pause not, sweet creature. Your sudden silence is as effective as a clap of thunder. Yet, see how you both misjudge me. This afternoon, catching a glimpse of your affectionate father as he was crossing some fields near Badger Pond, I fell a-thinking; and when I rose from my fall I had decided to humor him, to humor you, to humor all my dear friends. How? How else than by becoming a clerk—a neat, intelligent, industrious, accurate, and punctual clerk, in the employ of Messrs. Jakes & Petto, wholesale and retail seed-merchants!"

"Oh, Philip, darling!" exclaimed Janet, with a rush of emotion, "do you really mean it?"

"Certainly. There and then I cut a branch off a hazel-bush, fashioned it skilfully into a pen-holder, stuck it behind my ear, and spent nearly half an hour trying to get it to stick there when I moved my head. By George, I had no idea it was so difficult!"

"You dear, good, brave fellow! Oh, I am so glad! And we shall be so happy now, sha'n't we, love?"

She threw her arms round her husband's neck and kissed him fervently, while the tears leaped to her eyes. Philip Tuer returned her kiss. Any man would. Janet Tuer was a very kissable kind of a young woman, being as clean as an egg, as pretty as a picture, and as sweet and fragrant as the combined smell of roses and new-mown hay. To kiss such a woman would surely be a sore affliction to no man. But Philip Tuer derived no pleasure from the act, nor comfort, nor inspiration. His wife's gladness froze him to stone.

"Why, of course. We shall be happy as a toad under a harrow, as a trout on a grassy bank. One thing bothers me, Janet."

"What is it, dearest? Let me help you if I can," said Janet, with blind eyes but tender heart.

"Well, you see, wife, there are different styles of clerk. Of course I should like to be like your father—reticent, shrewd, solemn, deferential, the very model of the clerkly soul. But that is the bloom of the profession, nor can I hope to reach it under a full score years. There remains, so far as my limited observation runs, first, the smug and precise style, with black kid gloves; secondly, the smart and dapper style, with a check suit and a malacca cane; thirdly, the demure style, habited in neutral tints, unctuous, humble, overcome with a sense of Heaven's goodness in permitting it to breathe the same air as is inhaled by its employers and superiors. What bothers me is, which is the fit and proper style for me to make my own?"

He spoke gravely, and looked as solemn and serious as a judge on the bench. And Janet, who could scarcely restrain her laughter, was about to attempt a serious answer, when her father was heard calling her from up-stairs.

As she left the room she said, "May I tell him, love? It will so please him!"

"Oh yes, tell him. It may prolong his life," answered Tuer.

Left alone, he laughed a bit, frowned a bit, swore a bit. Then he muttered, *sub auditum*, "And she, my wife, actually thinks that Philip Tuer is going to turn seedsman's clerk! And what is better still, she is delighted with the idea! Good heavens, what a world to live in! Ah, well, now for the dramatic—to be, or not to be! Forty-eight hours will answer. A clerk in Jakes & Petto's. Old Petto used to touch his hat to me when he came to our place for orders. What an ass I have been!"

CHAPTER IV.

OF AN ANGLER, AND HOW HE DISPOSED OF HIS CATCH.

It was late the next morning when Tuer came down to breakfast. He had had a bad night, as Janet knew, and so she let him sleep on and did not disturb him. He was not sleeping, however. How could he sleep with such a desperate project in his brain? He dozed several times, and always he found himself consciously walking in the twilight to the edge of a deep abyss. For a moment, just long enough to note the swirling billows of blackness below him, he halted on the brink and gazed down. Then he deliberately put out his left foot, and going headlong down, awoke. He did this three times over, which was three times too often. After that sleep fled his brain, and he lay hour after hour thinking.

He came down-stairs with a pale face and bloodshot eyes, but his mouth was firm. He ate a good breakfast also. After a while he went out, and Janet sent her heart along with him, for she felt sure he was going to see Jakes & Petto. She put down his bad night to nervous excitement about the situation he was going to apply for. She gave him all her love, all her sympathy, poor girl; but for once—and, of course, at the very worst time—her instinct, her intuition, her divination, all her woman's wit failed her entirely. She might have been a stupid dolt, a silly, witless clod, instead of a creature of fine sensibilities.

The cause of this singular obtuseness was more or less of a problem; which is a safe saying, and not calculated to give of-

fence in any quarter. Of course she had done a previous violence to her own nature. In the middle of her brain and at the bottom of her heart she knew that her husband was no more fitted to be Jakes & Petto's clerk than was a wild elk to draw a plough. Nevertheless, for her father's sake, she tried to think her father's thought on the subject. It was a sound, common-sense thought enough, as we know; but, unfortunately, like many of its kind, it ran dead counter to the living truth. And Janet paid the penalty of blinking at truth and winking at unreality. The eyes of her soul grew dim—opacity of the crystalline lens. And while her husband was stepping off into thin air, with Gehenna below him, she thought he was in front of a mud-puddle, and was thinking about his patent-leather boots. Had she kept the cataractous film off the eyes of her soul, could she have saved him? Which, we grant, is a foolish question, knowing, as do all men, what poor, helpless bodies women are, with wit liker to water than to wine, whose love can do never a miracle, work no wonder, move no mountain, and is altogether a foolish, contemptible thing, reaching only to the bib and the sucking-bottle.

So Tuer went forth, and no good angel with a flaming sword went before him; but of the other kind of gentry, said to be of sable hue, mayhap there were many abroad. Oddly enough, in a few minutes after leaving home, Philip Tuer found himself quite close to the shop of Jakes & Petto.

"Perhaps, after all, it would be better if I turned in and applied for a job," he said to himself. He did not turn in, however, but passed by with his head up, and his face as hard as iron. A mile and a half out of town he came to a way-side inn, called the "Pack Horse," with whitewashed walls and thatched roof. As he drew near an urchin standing in the door-way touched his cap, and said, with a smile, foreseeing a copper, "Rod, sir?"

"Yes. Look alive."

In a few moments the lad returned, and handing a rod and line to Tuer, realized his copper vision. Tuer, being a lover of nature, was fond of walking; but to-day he strode on, seeing nothing overhead or underfoot. It was with a feeling of surprise that he all at once found himself at the end of his journey. How he got there he did not know. Roads, lanes, fields, moors, foot-paths, sheep-tracks, bridges, gates, stiles—not a single im-

pression of them all did his memory retain. He had come over three miles from the "Pack Horse," and his mind was an utter blank. By the same token, he had been pretty deep in thought.

He stood now beside a small plantation of firs that circled half round Hazelslack Pond—a tarn well stocked with carp, deep and dark-faced, like the firs that shadowed it. The tarn lay near the summit of Dunrigg, whence one could see a sample of well-nigh every kind of scenery known to northern men the world over. Mountains, valleys, plains, rivers, rocks, woods, barren heaths, rich meadow-lands, towns, villages, hamlets, solitary whitewashed houses, ruins gray and green, and between some not far distant fells yonder a broad bar of amber edging a great flat plate of burnished silver that caught the sunlight and broke it into a myriad quivering points. That was the sea. An arm of Old Ocean. What radiant limbs of mellow beauty he hath! And he thrusts them out over the land in huge wantonness, liking to touch the warm earth, who is none too coy—loving it with strong desire.

The day was warm, but not too bright, the sky being checkered with fleecy clouds; the bait of white honey and crumbs was killing; and Philip Tuer knew his craft, with its innumerable little subtleties. As a result he landed eleven stout carp in three short hours. He had no creel or landing-net, so he spread out his handkerchief and packed therein the goodly fish, all save one. This was a noble fellow weighing nigh upon ten pounds. There was not room for him in the handkerchief. His capture was a triumph of patient skill, and Tuer surveyed him with all the pride of conquest, not unmingled with admiration and pity for the fate of the brave fish.

Addressing the captive, Tuer said at length, "Well, old fellow, you are a regular trump. Still you have your little weaknesses, like other mortals. You live too much the life of the senses. Your appetite betrayed you. That white honey was too much for you, you fat-ribbed epicure! Now learn a lesson from your present plight, and live abstemiously in future, and follow not loose desires. You have another failing—you evidently don't know the rules of the game, or, what is more probable, you choose to despise them. You don't know when you are beaten, you pugnacious old rogue! But there, you are an Englishman,

and that accounts for a good deal. Besides, you are in difficulties, and it is not manly to kick a fellow when he's down. My boy, this may be my last day's fishing here forever and a day. Who knows? I respect you, sir; I sympathize with you. In token thereof I do now restore you to your lost estate. Return to the bosom of your anxious family, and may your years be many in Hazelslack Pond!"

With that he threw the carp back into the water.

Between two large pieces of jutting rock, at the distance of a stone's-throw from the pond, there was a spring of clear water that trickled down the side of Dunrigg. At the head of the spring was a deep hollow in the rock, the length of a man's arm, moss-covered, and overhung with ferns. Into this rocky basin Tuer emptied his handkerchief of the carp. Then he returned to the pond, put up his rod, and choosing a comfortable nook among the heather, filled his pipe and began to smoke. The sun was in his eyes, so he closed them. His back ached, so he stretched himself at full length, with his arm under his head. His pipe went out, smoked out but for the dottle at the bottom of the bowl, so he put it into his pocket. In the far distance a dog barked, a cow lowed, children were shouting at play, and all the sounds were mellowed. At intervals came a wild bee of fine taste seeking its treasure in the majenta sweetness of the heather, filling the air with the opiate melody of its drone. And Tuer slept.

When he awoke and sprang to his feet the sun had gone down behind the mountains, and the outlines of things in the lowlands were blurred. He looked at his watch, gave a whistle of surprise, and went down Dunrigg at a rattling pace. Arrived at the "Pack Horse," he entered, and went into the little stuffy parlor sacred to the quality. In addition to his tankard of ale he ordered pen and ink, paper and envelope. These supplied, he shut the door, drew his chair to the table, pulled at the tankard, and began writing a letter.

Having written half a dozen words, he chewed vigorously the end of the scarlet-ribbed pen-holder. This for some minutes, and then he suddenly remembered that the holder belonged to the inn, and was probably fingered by Jupiter knew whom. He was a fastidious man, and the wave of disgust that came over him made him feel sick and ill. He threw the pen on the table, rinsed

his mouth out with some beer, and leaned back in his chair, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. Half an hour later he rose and lighted a couple of candles in old brass candlesticks that stood on the mantle-piece, flanking a cow in blue stone and a horse in green stone. Then he sat down and finished his letter at a gallop. Rude, questionless, but we must peep over his shoulder as he writes the address on the envelope:

*To The Right Honorable
The Countess of Eden,
Stramon Court.*

He dropped his letter in at the post-office, and it was dark when he reached home. He looked tired and a bit disappointed Janet thought. Perhaps he was too late in his application at Jakes & Petto's. But she thought it kinder to say nothing about it that night.

CHAPTER V.

OF A PEDESTRIAN, AND HOW HE CUT ACROSS COUNTRY.

TUER went to bed and slept like a top. When he awoke it was to hear David Reed stepping along the gravelly garden-path leading to the mount of observation on his way to the bank. It was a rare morning, clothed with the broad, rich, silent beauty of a summer that had come late, and, loving the land, was in no haste to depart. The day of the year—indeed, the day of his life—had opened for Philip Tuer. Did Nature play into the hands of man, and array herself in harmony with his moods and actions, it had been no day of charm, sweet-smelling, fair and gracious as a noble woman in full dress; but rather a gray day and chill, with moaning wind and falling leaves, and a banked-up tempest, black as night, standing motionless and full of menace above the hills. Did man play into the hands of Nature, and let the blue sky into his spirit and the clean wind move through it, with the bright waters, and green grasses, creeping things, flying things, and such as jump, hop, skip, and swing, the skilled acrobats of the air, how

beautiful upon the mountains had been the feet of Philip Tuer that morning!

Some day, perhaps, when men have become tired of playing at make-believe, and half-believe, and no-believe, there will come among us a great prophet, to whom the winds and the waters and the many things of earth and sky shall, in all seemliness, be obedient. And opening unto us dark sayings of old, he shall expound to us the divine gospel of Nature, whereof are God and man. Then seeing clear and thinking straight, cool, sweet sanity shall creep into our devotion, and the "good gigantic smile o' the brown old earth," broad idiotic grin of animal and imp no longer, shall show to us the curves and ripples of divine humor. Then, in the Holy Place, gone the image of Stolidity, Vacuity, Formality, there shall shine forth Divine Intellect, nimble, subtle, delighting in the antics of a grasshopper as much as in the prayers of a saint.

Tuer, noting the fine day, and thinking of what lay before him, gave a long yawn of nervousness. At breakfast he said very little, but yawned a good deal. He was glad when Janet went out to do some shopping, leaving him alone. When she returned, a little late, she busied herself preparing dinner. David Reed was as punctual as a piece of clock-work, and he was due in ten minutes when Tuer left the cottage fully equipped for his favorite sport. He went straight to the establishment of Jakes & Petto.

The shop had two large plate-glass windows, in one of which were displayed seeds in cases, jars, and small linen bags, while the other window, behind which was the mahogany-panelled sanctum of the firm, had its lower half blackened, and ornamented with the name of the proprietors in large gilt letters. The world needs not to be informed, nor, indeed, so much as reminded, that this old-established house of business stands in Big Otter Row, where it has stood from the beginning of things, and where it will probably be found standing at the end of things. The world may go spinning down any ringing grooves it likes, but Jakes & Petto will stick, like wise men, to Big Otter Row, leading out of Lacklandgate.

For many a long year there had been no Jakes left alive to carry on the seed business of the kingdom, which was all the more reason to rejoice that Petto, in the male line, was manifold and vigorous. The elder Petto, who used to touch his hat to Tuer in

the old days, had graciously abdicated, like any King of Servia, in favor of his son. And no boy sovereign of a trumpery little kingdom could mouth the formula, "I the King," with a finer air of cock-a-doodle-doo than did Petto the younger. He had a florid face, large bushy side-whiskers, kept a saddle-horse, and thought no small beer of himself as one who followed the harriers over hill and dale. Tuer had chosen his time, thinking that the clerks would be away at dinner, and he would be able to have a quiet chat with the elder Petto. A salesman showed him into the mahogany sanctum, where sat Petto the younger.

"Is Mr. Petto in?" inquired Tuer.

"Yes, that is my name, Mr.—Mr. Tuer, isn't it? I thought so, though you look altered. How's the Squire, your father? Dear me, I forgot. You've had a row, and he's cut you off altogether, hasn't he?"

"What the devil is that—" began Tuer, his gorge rising at Petto the younger's familiarity. He checked himself suddenly as he remembered the object of his visit.

"Excuse me," he continued, "but are you the son of old Ebenezer Petto?"

"Yes; don't I look like him?" said the younger, curtly, feeling himself repulsed.

"I cannot say you do. I took you for one of the clerks. I wanted to see your father."

"He's not here. It isn't often he is now. He's turned the business over to me."

"Indeed," said Tuer, who was asking himself if it was possible to bring himself to state his business to Petto the younger.

There was a short silence, broken by Petto the younger remarking, "Perhaps you have called about the situation that old David Reed, your wife's father, wanted us to give you?"

It was like a spear-thrust, and Tuer gave a start. He gave a quick, fierce glance at Petto the younger, who stood in quite a deferential attitude, washing his hands in air, while a smile lurked in one corner of his mouth, like a fox with his head half out of his cover, afraid to venture into the open. Petto the younger never knew how near he was to being knocked down at that moment. Tuer pulled out his handkerchief, slowly polished his eyeglass, and fixing it, stared at Petto the younger as though he had been a zoological curiosity.

"Yes," he said, slowly—"yes, you are right. I feel I should like to be a clerk, and have you for my master. You too have been a clerk, I suppose?"

"I've been everything."

"Really. That accounts for much then. How much a week should I have to pay you for the honor of being your clerk, sir?" said Tuer, with gravity.

Petto the younger laughed a deep and loud haw-haw. "Pay us? I reckon we should have to pay you. How would a guinea a week do to start with?"

"A guinea, a whole guinea a week? No, I could not think of it. It is too much. Say a pound?"

"All right; if you are willing, I am. You know double-entry, I suppose?"

"Double-entry! Oh yes. It is like a double-first, is it not?"

"I don't know, never heard of it. Double-entry is our system of keeping accounts."

"I see. It is one of your trade secrets. You may rely on my discretion, sir."

"What a queer chap you are!"

"Eh? What is that you said?"

"I think you would soon pick it up, with a few lessons."

"Thank you, sir. But I know it already. In double-entry you simply put the figures down twice, the first time in order not to forget them, and the second time to make sure you have them right."

At this Petto the younger slapped his knees, and swore by Jove that he never heard anything so funny in his whole life before!

Tuer's humor, however, was too savage for mirth. Said he, "If my humor is so good, perhaps you will pay me half a crown a week extra for it? I can pledge my word that so long as I remain in your employ I shall have an unfailing supply of it."

"All right. Half a crown a week for fun is a good investment. Is it natural to you? Does it come easy to you to be so odd, so delightfully funny?"

"Quite so. As a clerk, I give you my word, I shall be one of the oddest fellows alive. When am I to begin work?"

"You won't mind me bringing in a friend now and then, when you show off, eh? I know one or two gentlemen who would enjoy it awfully."

"Should not mind a bit. Only keep it quiet, you know. And if you could fit up a corner of a room like a cage, you know, I could do the thing to perfection. Of course, your friends are gentlemen? Between you and me and that inkpot, you know, I could not undertake to perform before any but gentlemen under—under three-and-sixpence a week. Compensation, you know, for loss of dignity."

"No; I'll stick to 'gentlemen only,' and half a crown a week."

"It is a bargain then?"

"It's a bargain. Here's my hand on it. Of course I can't be shaking hands with my employés, you know. But, just for once, here's my hand to the bargain."

Petto the younger extended his fat red hand, ornamented with a couple of rings. By a dexterous and comical movement Tuer made the handle of his landing-net to assume the position of his arm, and Petto the younger found himself grasping a wooden handle instead of a hand. He dropped it suddenly, stared for a moment in blank amazement, and then flushed crimson.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, angrily.

"I am a humorist, you know. Part of the fun, to be sure. Why, bless me, you are as dull as a lobster before boiling!"

"Well, dull or not dull, I don't like those kind of tricks. I thought you meant something," said the younger, sullenly.

"Oh no, I never mean anything. That is the secret of my humor, only—don't tell. If you tell, somebody will know. Am I to begin work next Monday, sir?"

"No. There's a clerk leaving three weeks on Monday. You can begin then. And—and as for this half-crown-a-week-extra business, I will think over it. I am not sure that—indeed, upon mature deliberation, I think it would not be advisable. It might—"

"Certainly, sir, I understand, it might. After mature deliberation, I feel it my duty to let you know, sir, that, like barley, the market value of fine humor like mine fluctuates considerably. The tendency at present is upward. In three weeks incoming reports point to the probability that it will have risen six penny points per week full."

"I see. You think I had better buy for the rise, eh?"

"Precisely."

"Well, call in again at 10.45 next Wednesday, and I will let you know. What is your full name?"

"Phillipus Augustus Adolphus Severus Decimus Tuer, sir."

"The deuce!"

"Yes, you can call me that for short, if you like. Deuce Tuer, clerk to Jakes & Petto. It sounds nice. They commonly call me Philip, though. Good-morning, sir, and thank you ever so much."

"Good-morning. I am very busy just now. Good-day, Tuer."

Tuer removed his eyeglass and went out, and as he walked along Big Otter Row his face was a study. He took the same direction and covered the same ground as on the day previous. A mile or so beyond the "Pack Horse" he fell in with a sergeant of the county constabulary, whom he knew by name, and the two walked together for nearly half a mile. The sergeant himself was a follower of the gentle craft; their talk ran mainly along the common line of interest and experience, and when they parted at the foot of Dunrigg, the sergeant saluted Tuer and wished him a good day's sport. Arrived at the tarn, the first thing Tuer did was to make sure that he was alone, and that no one was lurking among the firs. Then he proceeded to the stream-head between the rocks, and took a peep on his knees at the carp that he had emptied into the moss-covered basin, overhung with ferns. He was now ready to begin work in earnest, and five minutes later he landed his first fish. A quarter of an hour went by, and not another catch.

He was in the act of putting some fresh bait on, when he suddenly raised his head and listened attentively. He had quick ears, and in that upland silence small sounds travelled far. He had caught the peculiar thud of a footstep on the springy grass and heather. Presently he beheld the figure of a man coming into view from one of the summit hollows of Dunrigg. Wanderers upon Dunrigg were rare. An occasional fisherman at the tarn, a game-keeper by chance, a shepherd two or three times a week at this season, with now and then an odd enthusiast who thought it worth while to walk so far to see so much. Beyond these, there was none to break the solitude of Dunrigg. The sheep were there, but they seemed, with their dark faces, to have grown out of the mountain, and to belong to it. With nature men grow natural, and the face of the natural man is a mirror of his feelings. Surprise, chagrin, pleasure, each in its turn was mirrored with beautiful fidelity on the countenance of Tuer. His feeling ran hard upon the heels of his thought. And the look of pleasure lingered.

When the man, a shepherd, came up, Tuer made a throw that won in a trice the tender heart of the man familiar with lambs. A responsive carp rose to the occasion, and fell in no time on the heather, wriggling with astonishment. And the shepherd touched his cap with admiration and gratitude, feeling that after all there was virtue in the world, and things in general were not nearly so bad as one might be tempted to think they were when the lambing season was out of gear. There followed between fisherman and shepherd a short genial talk that smacked of the soil; and as a sign of brotherhood and amity, before the shepherd dropped down the mountain-side he filled his short black pipe with some of Tuer's tobacco, lighted it, and left its sweet fragrance, like a memory, behind him.

As soon as he was out of sight Tuer put his fishing-tackle up, and going to the stream-head, lifted the carp that he had caught the day before into his creel, and descended the mountain in a direction that led him beyond Fellby. The rivulet, whose headwaters had held the imprisoned carp, after trickling down the steep wind-swept slopes of Dunrigg, found itself in the lowlands grown big, in its own eyes, with gathered waters, and able to realize its mountain dream of becoming a trout stream. Fringed with hawthorn-trees and bushes of the alder and wild rose, it wound a serpentine course through pastures deep in lush and lusty grass; milch-cows lay therein, ruminating, and practising a slow meditation on the goodness of a green world, vexed only by teasing flies and stinging gnats.

Hard by the stream stood a full-dressed horse-chestnut, glorious to look upon. Its trunk was all invisible, being surrounded, from the ground to the first tier of foliage, by a mighty circular holly-bush, the home of many things—birds and animals, whose king was a notable brown owl, from fear of whom many of his subjects in the holly-bush kingdom went in nightly terror of their lives. In this quiet-seemig bush, palpitating with hopes and fears, a very world of tiny tragedies, fierce passions, loves and hates, Philip Tuer hid his fishing-tackle and his fish. Looking at his watch, he whistled with surprise.

“I shall be half an hour late, and do my best. Four miles the other side of the town. By cutting across country I shall save the best part of a mile. Here goes.”

With this his head went up, and he started off across the past-

ure. He went straight, and, like a good hunter, took all before him. He could jump like a wild buck, and deflected not in his course by reason of any stream, hedge, gate, or wall. Grass land or stubbled field, it made no difference, only when the ground was wet and marshy did he swerve aside. His pace was neither walk nor run, but a kind of dog-trot, and the way he got over the ground would have made a redskin yellow with envy. Thrice he hid himself to avoid being seen, and none saw him.

Thus, at length, half an hour late indeed, but punctual to his own timing, he reached the shrubbery overlooking the narrow lawn on that side of Stramon Court.

CHAPTER VI.

OF A WOMAN A-DRY AND A-HUNGRY, BUT NOT FOR BREAD AND WATER.

“A MILD and pleasing woman,” that was all that the stout old sea-dog, Admiral Lord Collingwood, had to say in praise of the Princess Marie Amélie, Duchess of Orleans, some time Queen of the French, and one of the loveliest women in Europe.

Francisca, Countess of Eden, was likewise a mild and pleasing woman. On analysis, perhaps, her mildness, in part, lay in her soft persuasive tones and the peculiar timbre of her melodious voice. In part, also, in the appealing, sympathetic expression of her brown eyes; and yet more in the deep rich silence of her manner. She made no noise. The hinges of her behavior were well oiled. Tall, graceful, dignified, she spoke and acted with the quiet rhythm of a piece of exquisitely fitted machinery, without jar or creak. Stately she was too, without any affectation or seeming effort. A woman of fashion also, without any of the modern and false notes of the same—to wit, restlessness of limbs, awkwardness of movements, sudden and startling surprises of action, and a loudness of voice unnatural and vulgar. There was no suggestion of a squeaking door, or a cat with a tin coffee-pot tied to its tail, or a small hurricane on a circular tour round the compass, or a village pump on a walking expedition, or any other

wretched and irreverent idea, awakened by the entrance of Lady Eden. Seeing her one remembered the breath of an old rose-garden, the cadence of a once-loved lilt, the burst of music that upon a time did shake the soul like a summer wind at eventide among the leaves of the poplars. She could sit for an hour and never move; but, then, she could also move for an hour and never rest. So that her mildness was not the correlative of inertia or insipidity. Francisca, Countess of Eden, was as insipid as the mellowest of old wines. And there is a taste to be accounted for in these things; for some like beers, some spirits, some liqueurs, some wines. The Countess was just like—but no; there is only a limited quantity of the precious stuff made, so the less said about it the better. And the grocer has a large stock of Gladstone claret on hand.

The Countess could paint, model in clay, make pretty verses, deftly intertwining thought with sentiment, dipped in melody, good enough, had she been a man and master of the art of self-advertisement, to have won the reputation of a minor poet, a maker of “ballades,” a favorite with second-hand booksellers. She did not publish, she burned. She could discourse right well on the violin; but her favorite and rarest instrument was her voice, a soprano. This was divine in its compass and sweetness and purity.

Imps of every color love not music, fear it, fly before it. Every revolution under the sun might have been nipped, and altogether cast away, if, at the critical moment, a first-rate band, playing popular airs, had appeared on the scene. Saul, smitten with the blues, called like a wise man for no physician other than the man with the harp. In her sorrow and desolation of heart oftentimes had Francisca, her voice failing her; seized her violin and played herself out of perdition into paradise. The art of playing a penny whistle would have saved many a man—aye, and many a woman—when their hour was upon them, from despair, from death. Her fiddle had certainly saved Francisca.

She loved books. Loved them enough to buy them and read them—an odd thing, certainly, for a fashionable lady to do. She met her elegant sisters, however, on the common ground of liking to talk books, only they had not read them as she had. A small point of difference that, and hardly worth notice but that large things hang on small.

She had travelled much, in lands wild and tame, and seen men and manners rude and polished, and women, and their ways and their woes, in the uttermost parts of the earth. Not infrequently the globe-trotter might just as well have spent his time beating eternally the boundaries of his native parish. For when he is not a giraffe gazing for the palm-groves of the moon, like a hound he runs with his nose to the ground. He travels farthest who brings back most treasure. The loot is everything.

Francisca's pretty head was packed with knowledge, not hard, raw, and indigestible, but subject to the subtile chemistry of the understanding, whereby it yielded its finer essence that filtered into her heart, where it became wisdom of the sweetest kind. When the cistern is full, the pitcher returneth not empty. Out of a full head and a full heart flowed the conversation of the Countess. To hear her talk, when she knew her listener, was to catch an idea of what Nature was driving at when she endowed womankind with speech. Between it and the ducking-stool lay the difference between the sublime and the ridiculous.

How to set forth in words the fair face of a woman. A brow of such and such a kind; item, a nose; item, a pair of eyes; item, a pair of lips; item, a set of teeth; item, a chin; item, a complexion; item, a facial line, oval, round, or square. Say she is ugly, and she is so; say she is lovely, and the thing is done. A sorry makeshift at the best. We need lines, not syllables; a picture rather than a description. An image, a portrait, a true likeness, to which we may point and say, "See, that is she," or "Behold, that is the man himself." So saying, one would look upon the portrait of Francisca, Countess of Eden, and the look would linger. For who ever hastened to turn away their eyes from the face of a beautiful woman? Brown hair soft as the color of her eyes, a long oval face, a fruit-shaped chin, and full curved lips, with a pure complexion. But in the last analysis it is the soul that makes or mars. And the quality of Francisca's soul was beautiful. There we will let the matter rest as regards her beauty.

She was a man's woman, not a woman's woman. A few women idolized her; not a few men worshipped her. She attracted them, charmed them, subdued them. They felt that they understood her, and, what was more, that she understood them. They were not afraid of her, and, better still, she was not afraid of them.

Such a woman is invincible. Her reputation was flawless. Her honor intact. She was a prize worth winning; and some tried, and failed. Her blood might have been water, and her heart a block of ice, only they were not. And men knew they were not. This was her strength, her glory, her charm.

There were times when, childless, she would have given her right hand in exchange for a child, all her own, to love, to live for, to press to her breast to ease the aching of her heart. To live was to love, to love was to live—that was her creed. She held it not in virtue of her head—though not in spite of it either—but by virtue of the necessities of her nature. She was made to love, and to be loved. Loving and loved, she thrived, blossomed, put forth fruit pleasant to the eye, sweet to the taste, and good for the soul of man. Forbidden love, and she drooped, withered in spirit, and desired death greatly. That she sought it not, in one or two severe passages in her experience, must be put to the credit of her Stradivarius. 'Tis curious that nature should play such freaks, should indulge in such exquisitely cruel experiments. This world is hardly the place, nor is England quite the country, in which to cast a soul with such an appetite as that of Francisca, Countess of Eden. Yet the trick is not a new one. Many are there who have died of starvation, when the only food they asked was love. And some there are yet alive for whom there is a famine in the land, and no Stradivarius. Francisca, Countess of Eden, seeking love found it not. Her husband did not love her.

The Right Honorable Charles Edward Fitzallan Impey, Earl of Eden, Viscount Paradise, Baron Elysium of Elysium in the county of Kerry, and of sundry other honors and dignities the possessor, did not love his wife. He loved himself; loved his titles, honors, dignities; loved his broad acres, his country seats, his woods, his moors, his grouse, partridges, and pheasants; his hacks, hunters, and racers; his dogs, and almost everything that belonged to him. Also a few women that belonged legally to other men. But he did not love his wife. Had she not belonged to him, he would have adored her until he had discovered that she despised him. It is not recorded that he loved his tenants, or that his tenants loved him. On the other hand, they did love Francisca; so did her servants, so did her horses, her dogs, her birds, and her flowers. As for these last, it mattered

not who tended them however tenderly ; they pined, drooped their heads, and shed their petals, and died if Francisca left them.

But the Earl loved her not. He had made no calculations of doing so—the necessities of the situation, in his opinion, not demanding it. He gave her the honor of his name and the dignity of his rank ; what more could she require ? He had married her—an orphan, the child of a ship-owner—for her *dot* of a quarter of a million, himself being heavily encumbered with debts at the time. He would have preferred to marry a woman of rank, and would have done so could he have found one with a quarter of a million ready to take him. The money had set him on his feet, and he had won one of the best women in the world ; but so utterly graceless was his nature, that his feeling was one of resentment towards the author of his good-fortune. An American would have summed his lordship up as a “darned mean cuss.” And the judgment shall rest.

But Francisca—she had need of her Stradivarius. She was only eighteen when she married the man, who had not the smallest intention of keeping his marriage vow, to love and cherish her. It took twelve months to kill her beautiful dreams, her tender illusions. In a month from her wedding-day the battle in their behalf had begun. She made a brave fight, but facts are chieftains that winna ding. And within a year facts had triumphed. They lay about her like the bones of the dead—hard, hideous, undeniable—covering the trackless plain of her life knee-deep, concealing every path of escape. For four years longer she exhausted her woman’s wit in attempts to win, or surprise, her husband’s love.

In society she was regnant, the envy of women, the admiration of men. She won and wielded her sceptre, hoping, wildly, thereby to draw a look of attention from her lord. Her lord kept his glance averted, and gave his smiles to women whose hearts rankled at his wife’s supremacy. Men, high-born and powerful, sought her company and her counsel, paid her homage, and would have dared everything to win her love. She gave men frankly her friendship, her authority, her influence, and the uses of her intellect. But her heart, her treasure, she gave to none. Like a column of alabaster she stood upright and pure. Meanwhile this woman’s heart was breaking, all for lack of love. Nightly she fell asleep, her pillow wet with weeping, to dream of her husband

and his great passionate love, to which hers leaped as flame to flame. In the morning she awoke, and the Stradivarius filled the lofty chambers with bursts of strange, agonizing melody, dreadful and delicious, like a spirit chanting the song of its lost estate. And she had no child.

It was in summer-time that it happened. The Earl—the white deck of whose yacht was never trodden by the dainty feet of his wife—was away yachting, Heaven knows where, with a party of his friends, female and male, on board. The Countess was among the Carpathian mountains, with no other companion than her maid, a creature of cosmopolitan instincts and experience. About them were the great mountains, covered with dense forests and sunny slopes that waved with rich crops of wheat and barley and oats. One day there came to the small town where she was staying a stray Englishman. He put up at the same inn. He seemed much about her own age, and looked a gentleman, she thought, as she beheld him from her room among the trees in the garden. They met, and with surprise and pleasure she recognized him as the son of a neighboring squire at home.

They walked, road, climbed, fished, and talked together. Why not? She was a woman of the world, and he was a man of the world, and they belonged in a sense to the same world, and in another sense they were both out of the world. Not for the lack of importunity, nor of opportunity, had she kept herself thus far from the touch that stains. Mistress of herself and her actions, she met men fearlessly and frankly every day of her life. What she did now among the mountains and valleys of Hungary she was accustomed to do in the lanes and in the drawing-rooms of England. She had done the same in every quarter of the globe. And who was this young sprig of squiralty that she should fear him? should pay him the doubtful compliment of an unaccustomed reserve and caution? Had the idea occurred to her she would have put it by with fine disdain. But, in truth, the idea never entered her mind. Her confidence in herself was superb. Vanity? Francisca, Countess of Eden, vain? Not a bit of it. So to speak, she had won her confidence in the very thick of the battle, and she knew her own strength.

She liked this young Englishman the more she saw of him. He was well-bred, intelligent, sympathetic. Could talk well, could listen well, and though questionless at bottom a fool as re-

garded women, he did not exhibit the mark of the current fool in senseless chatter, chaff, and compliment. He took her seriously—that is to say, intelligently, sympathetically, chivalrously. She liked to be so taken. Thus day by day a closer interest grew, a finer understanding. She told him nothing of importance; but when he told her of matters sacred to confidence she accepted the responsibility, and gave him comfort and advice. Thus arose tenderness touch by touch, and gathered color as it grew.

There came a day when they went together into a great pine-forest, and while she sat on a bank of moss her companion reclined at her feet. He had a pleasant voice, and wit and skill to catch and express the sense of what he read. He read to her every day, and to-day he produced a small volume of poems. Holding up the book that she might read the poet's name, he said, "Is he a favorite of yours?"

"Hardly," she answered, with a grave smile; "yet I admire him greatly."

"You find him obscure?"

"Yes, until I have punctuated him aright. Then he is quite luminous. If I were a friend of his I should give him lessons in punctuation. He is masculine, he is thoughtful, he never gushes, and is too wise and strong to have any dealings with foolish optimism. At times his plummet sounds a depth that almost startles one. Yes, I respect and admire him greatly. The nobility of a mighty headland of rock is his."

"And pray, what more would you have?"

"I must love my poet."

"Cannot you love this one?"

"No."

"Why?"

"He has no melody. The stream flows freely and brightly; it dances and sparkles with true sunlight. But somehow its waters make no music. And for me the charm of the brook is its melodious babble, that winds its way into my heart and lives there, the hum of the sea in the far-distant shell."

"Do you remember his 'Flight of the Duchess?'"

"Indistinctly. I read it"—she sighed gently—"when I was quite a girl. Were you going to read it to me?"

"Yes. But if you—"

"Do, please. I should like to hear it again."

So he read to her the sad story of the little lady no bigger than a big white crane. Suddenly a sound, half sigh, half sob, caused him to look up at Francisca. Her mouth quivered, and a tear fell down, and lay on the back of her hand. In an instant he seized her hand and kissed the tear away.

"You are in trouble, you are unhappy," he murmured, gently.

"Yes, I am unhappy, that is true. I am also foolish, it seems. Forgive me, please."

She tried to withdraw her hand, but he held it firmly.

"Cannot I help you? I would give my life to do so."

"Then how cheap you must hold your life, my friend!" she said, with a slight laugh. And as their eyes met the color rose slowly to her face, and burned with terrible beauty deeper and deeper as they gazed speechless into each other's eyes.

"Francisca—"

She started, and her eyes drooped at the familiar name.

"I must love you, or I shall die."

.

"The forests had done it; there they stood;
We caught for a moment the powers at play;
They had mingled us so, for once and good,
Their work was done—we might go or stay,
They relapsed to their ancient mood."

So wrote the man without melody, but not without irony. And that day did the writing hold good of Francisca, Countess of Eden, and Philip Tuer.

CHAPTER VII.

OF FRANCISCA'S LOVES, OLD AND NEW.

STRAMON COURT, the ancestral home and favorite seat of the Earls of Eden, was a huge pile of brick and stone that made up in antiquity what it lacked in style. Indeed, of style it had none, though of purpose it had plenty, being originally built in the cattle-lifting, border-raiding times as a stronghold of defence and offence. It had many of the marks of the fingers of Time upon it, but none of its strong, devouring teeth. It had mellowed,

but not crumbled. Set amid thick shrubbery, with dark woods at the back and an ancient deer-park at the front, the piebald, battlemented mass frowned dark and grim at the haughty hills that had watched four centuries in vain for its downfall. It would come sooner or later they knew, and it knew. Meanwhile it defied their broad-based scorn, and stood on its own foundations, square, solid, proud, man-made, man-owned, man-loved, a type of British history in a sense they never were, and never would be. Looking at the surly, burly pile, none could have the least doubt that such was its thought and such was its feeling. And the like of such buildings John Bull can understand and respect.

In one of the drawing-rooms of Stramon Court—a small room, very lofty, with furniture of the Queen Anne period—Francisca, Countess of Eden, was pacing to and fro. Oddly enough, it was just three years to the very day since her return from that trip to the Carpathian Mountains, when some one read to her the “Flight of the Duchess.” Beautiful then, she was more beautiful now. She had ripened, mellowed; her form was more perfect, her color more exquisitely delicate. In her long robe of blue and gold, with a high ruffle round her neck, she looked divinely sweet and gracious. Nevertheless, she was altered. She looked a new woman, and the difference lay in the expression of her face.

Aforetime there had lurked about her face, even in her most vivacious moods, a troublous hint of sadness, a haunting suggestion of melancholy. Of this not a trace was left. That by some means or other she had sipped the nectar of contentment, and become friends with peace, was a truth writ legibly on her countenance. So plainly was the writing written that even now it was not obscured, though she evidently labored under a painful excitement as she walked the room restlessly, her hands clasped tightly behind her. Her glance wandered from the long, low window that stood ajar to the antique clock set in the wall and curiously framed.

“I wonder what it means. So far he has been true to his promise. What can he want? It is twelve months since he promised solemnly never to come near me again. Oh dear, oh dear, he is twenty-five minutes late already! Perhaps he is not coming, after all. I wonder could one suffocate one’s self with mere nervousness?”

She did not string them together, but threw out these sentences one at a time, with a pause and a tramp between each.

"He told me once, I remember, with a laugh, that getting intoxicated was all right, but that getting sober again was all wrong. I suppose I am getting sober now. If I could only have foreseen this hour! What then? Dear me, it might have been his voice I heard instead of my own. What then? No; he saved me, and I will not play the hypocrite to myself. He surely cannot hope that— Will he never come? He said half-past four in his letter. That old bank clerk—his wife's father, and I never thought of it till this moment!—little, odd, faithful fellow that he is—he is waiting for me to—"

Then she started, put her clasped hands to her bosom, and murmured: "Ha! there he is! Oh, why do I feel like this? What is the use of having a heart of ice, when it only melts in front of the fire! Muriel, my babe, my pure, sweet babe, help me, help me!"

The piteous prayer had scarce left her lips when the swinging window was pushed open, and Philip Tuer stepped lightly into the room.

"Mr. Tuer!" exclaimed Francisca, with a little affectation.

"Mr. Tuer! Why is her ladyship so formal to-day? Why am I not 'Philip,' 'dear Philip,' 'my own dear Phil,' as of old?" he said, gayly, as she withdrew her hand, over which he had bent reverentially, and kissed with courtier-like homage.

"Need you ask? Did we not promise each other to let the dead bury the dead?"

"But the dead sometimes rise again. As a good Christian, you must believe it, Francisca."

She smiled as she answered: "I thought you were shy of miracles? No; for us there can be no resurrection of what ought never to have lived."

"Ought never to have lived. That sounds like the severe voice of a moralist, but it is not; it is only the formal voice of a conventionalist. It does not frighten me a bit. You got my letter safely?"

"Yes. Why were you so reckless? If the Earl—"

"I know," interrupted Tuer; "I know all about it. He is a dog in the manger. For the matter of that, in or out of the manger, he is a dog."

"Is it for you to say that to me of my husband?"

"Well, no. It is brutal of me, I admit, and I ask your forgiveness. I knew he would not be at home, because I happened to see him yesterday by the station. He favored me with a limp paw; said he scarcely knew me, it was such a deucedly long time since he had last seen me or—thought about me. Polite, was it not?"

"Did he really say that?" said Francisca, laughing.

"He did. He fixed me with his eyeglass as he said it," answered Tuer, a bit savagely.

"How deliciously rude! Had you strength left in you to answer?"

"Not till I had fixed my glass. Then I felt his equal, and said, with a laugh, I was very sorry, but not in the least surprised, because a loss of memory was a common result of—dissipation. How was that for a retort?"

"Pretty good for one just recovering from concussion of the brain," answered the Countess, her eyes alight with humor.

"It was good enough for the Earl, at any rate. For a moment his lower jaw dropped beautifully, and he stared at me in silent agony. 'I am going up to town for a few days,' he gasped, at length, in a dazed sort of way, and turned on his heel and left me. That was how I knew you were alone."

"Why do you want to see me? You know you ought not to come. You have no right to be here."

"Does love, then, confer no right?" said Tuer, softly, but with infinite daring.

"Hush, I pray you! The very walls have ears. How dare you talk to me like that, after your promise never—"

Said Tuer, with a shrug of his shoulders, and a laugh, hard and metallic, that grated on the sensitive ears of Francisca, "Do not, for pity's sake, dangle so the dead carcass of my unfortunate promise before me. Somehow it suggests a cruel game-keeper displaying his dead stoat, for the benefit of the living, on a post in the woods."

"I do not mean to be cruel—to hurt your feelings in any way. But I have trusted your word of honor, without a doubt, till now."

"Now you doubt me?"

"Have you not broken your promise by coming here?"

"So be it. I have broken a promise—a thing of air, contracted by a spasm of paltry prudence, by a foolish mood of vulgar wisdom. For twelve long, dreary months I have played the common, stupid, superstitious man, and kept my promise. I have allowed the base fetter to hold me. Well, I am tired of it—more, I am disgusted with myself."

"Ah, then you have ceased to respect me, to care for my happiness, to pity me! You have grown cruel!" cried Francisca, with emotion.

"No, Francisca. I have come to tell you that love is not to be permanently shackled and imprisoned by restraints so puny and contemptible. As a strong spring-tide rolls itself towards the warm sunlit sands, so has my love, Francisca, risen within me, and brought me once again, soul and body, to your feet."

There was a great passion in his eyes, and his voice made Francisca tremble and grow weak as water. He seized her hand and covered it with mad kisses.

"Oh, Philip, Philip, it cannot be! I must not—my Muriel—leave me, let me go, let me go!"

She struggled to get free, but he would not let go her hand.

"Never! I cannot live without you," he murmured, hoarsely.

"You must. For my honor! For your own happiness! Think of your wife, Philip—and perhaps—I know not—perhaps you are now a father. Oh, for Heaven's sake, go from me!" pleaded the Countess.

"No, I have counted the cost. I have weighed the matter as in scales. Without you, Francisca, life is of no more worth to me than a rotten nut to a squirrel. And I know, I feel, I see, that you love me now as passionately as you ever did. You dare not deny it!"

"Ah, God, that is true!" she moaned, and snatching her hand from his, she hid her face, and sobbed deeply.

"You darling, you are mine forever now!"

His arms went round her in a mad embrace. For a moment, full of fate, her destiny hanging on a thread, did Francisca yield herself an unresisting prisoner. Then, all suddenly, with an agonizing cry of "My Muriel!" she broke from him and stood erect. Oh, how beautiful did she then look, as she made a mighty effort of her will and looked him steadily in the face, while the forces

of her womanhood rallied to her like succoring angels! Soft and low was her voice, but steady and brave.

"No, Philip, not that. I will say it—I love you, Philip, ah me! ah me! I love you, though I can never again be anything to you but a stranger—and a sad memory. Nay, hear me to the end before you speak. My husband loves me not, ah, woe is me! For five years, by every honest art known to love and woman, I did my best to win his love. I failed. Failed so much as to win his respect, even his courtesy. Then I met you, and you gave me love. Oh, Philip, it was guilty love, and wicked, but it was love! And I think the traveller dying of thirst in the desert would drink the water that was offered him, even without asking was it clear or muddy."

Said Tuer, bitterly, standing with his arms folded, watching her closely, "And you drank it until you became well enough to turn critical and fastidious. Then you threw it away in disgust."

Answered Francisca, gently, "Yes, that is true—in part. You had been married a year before I knew of it, and—"

Broke in Tuer with, "What had that to do with it? I was not more married than you were."

"I do not blame you in the least. Still, do you wonder that it came upon me with a shock? If you loved her, you could not have loved me? If you did not love her, then you married her not for her beauty, which, compared with my own, is as water unto wine, but for the money you expected she would have. My Earl of Eden did that."

It was like a cut of a whip across the face, and it made Tuer wince. For the first time his bad nature crept into his face; then it flowed into his speech, as he said, with a paltry sneer, "I see now—never thought of it before—you were jealous."

Francisca's eyes opened wide at his words.

"No," she answered, slowly, "it was not that. Though it might well have been, for I am a woman, Philip. I felt that I had no right to wrong a young, innocent, trusting, loving wife, such as you told me yours was. I appealed to your honor, and you responded to my appeal in a manner, Philip, that did not lessen my esteem for you, or make it easier for me to say adieu. We parted, as you know, forever. And since then—oh, how can I tell you!"

"Yes, I know. You have become a mother. The bells of Fell-

by rang in honor of the event. And his lordship cursed the sex of the 'brat,' as report says he called it."

"Yes, yes; mother, mother am I of the sweetest little baby girl outside of heaven."

Looking at the face of Francisca just then, transfigured with rapture, one knew without more words that she had drawn the divine nectar of content from the little flower-like face of her babe.

Said Tuer, with a note of irony, "I shouldn't have thought it, but you take to maternity like a duck to water. Does the young seraph, may I ask, resemble you or—her father?"

"Oh, she has my hair, my eyes, my chin, my mouth. She is my own, my very own!"

"Really. It seems a very one-sided affair, from your account. All mother and no father."

"Philip!" exclaimed Francisca, softly, "she has made a new woman of me. She has given me something to live for. She has filled my poor dark soul with light, with warmth, with endless music. And between us two she stands like an angel with a flaming sword. I do not reproach you, Philip. Why should I? You fed me with the wine and honey of love—stolen though it was—when I was faint and far spent for lack of it. Nor will I add to my dark offence the blackness of ingratitude. And now, now you will be your own dear good self, and go from me!"

She held out her hand to give him a farewell shake.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF HOW ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER.

TUER did not take the hand that Francisca held out to him, nor yet did he show any signs of leaving her. He paced the room for some time, with wrinkled brows and eyes on the floor.

At length he said, with a hard laugh, "Well, yes, I see I must, so to speak, find lodgings elsewhere. It is evident there are no longer any apartments to let here; but if I am to be 'good,' as you style it, and control my passion for you, Francisca, I must be

out of the range of your influence. You are like one of those magnetic rocks that draw ships afar off to destruction."

"Ah, that is a cruel speech, Philip," sighed Francisca.

"True, nevertheless," retorted Tuer, bluntly.

"We need never so much as see each other again. You live four miles away."

"And what, think you, are four miles, or forty, or four hundred? By Heaven, I could feel your eyes, I could taste your lips, I could hear the rustle of your skirts a thousand miles away! No, no, Francisca; I must put the earth's diameter between us, if I am not to come to you again as I have come to-day," said Tuer, with fierce energy.

"You mean you must leave England?" inquired Francisca, striving to hide the color that overswept her face at his passionate speech.

"Decidedly."

"Would you mind it very much? It is a great deal to ask of you, Philip. But for your own—for my sake?"

"Oh, I am willing to go. If it must be, it must be. But how can I? I am practically penniless. I do not know how to earn a sou, thanks to the beautiful system under which I have been reared. A fellow like me in the colonies would go to the dogs straight away, unless he had either money or influence. But for my marriage, both would have been at my disposal. Now I have neither."

Then he let fall an oath, the first Francisca ever heard him use. It startled her not a little. She hesitated a while, as though dreading to pain him. Then, timidly, with a supplicating smile and soft caressing voice, she said, "Philip, will you do me a last kindness? Oh do, please! Will you?"

"If I can, certainly," he answered, with a hesitancy of voice that made his words sound churlish.

"I have two hundred pounds I can command without any questions being asked. Oh, it is a pitiful sum to offer you! but I could not get more for some time without, perhaps, awakening curiosity, if not suspicion. If you will only take it, Philip—oh do, please—please, Philip!"

A look so strange, so complex, so fearful, crossed his face that Francisca felt something like a spasm of fear and pain shoot through her. She thought she knew this man through and

through. Did she? Another question: had he changed in the interval of his absence from her?

Given time and space, and the individual will repeat himself through the generations until he is found, in England, in the guise of an English gentleman, and on the coast of Guinea as a naked negro, with black skin, snub nose, thick lips, and an odor rancid, like that of the buck-goat. The same ancestor in both. Very odd this. But good science—if the science is good. Those who know all about these funny things tell us that the individual who repeats himself in so humorous a fashion does not always demand a “blank check” as regards time, but will work his transformation tricks, so to speak, in no time. They point to pigeons, and the head of the *niata* cattle of Buenos Ayres and Mexico. Another set of experts, meddling not with things physical, but ever dealing with matters spiritual, and therefore of presumption, speaking with authority—these report as truth that a man morally as black as a negro may, in the twinkling of an eye, acquire a moral complexion as fair and beautiful as the pink and white of an English woman’s face. Very odd this. But good theology—if the theology is good. The variety become hereditary if the naturalist jogs along the same road that is galloped over by the conversion of the divine. If a man can change in one direction, it is presumable he may in another. From black to white, physically and mentally, is cheering. But how about from white to black? Sad, of course, but is it true? If not, why not?

Francisca made sure that she had read the book of Philip Tuer’s nature from beginning to end. Yet here he was with a new unguessed-of chapter of the book open before her eyes. Was it, in truth, an added chapter, or was it simply one whose uncut leaves had not as yet been opened?

“Why do you look like that? Have I offended you? I only wanted to be of some small service to you, Philip.”

“Thank you, Francisca. You are kind, very kind; and they say that a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Though, I fancy, none but a fool would clutch at a straw if he was within reach of a life-belt. With your leave, sweet Countess, I am not a fool,” quoth Tuer, with tone and manner bewildering to Francisca.

“Philip,” she cried, and her voice sounded full of pain and trouble, “what do you mean? Why that strange tone? I do not understand you!”

"No, curse it; of course you don't. How should you?"

"Ah, I have vexed you, I see. You are too proud to let me help you—but why should you be?"

"I am not too proud to be helped, but I do not care to be mocked. Your kindness is but a pretence," said Tuer, cold as ice.

"Forgive me, oh forgive me! I am dull—awkward—stupid. How have I grieved you—dear?"

Yes, she called him "dear," and the word went through him like a sword. For a moment he wavered in his dreadful purpose. His better nature surged up within him, and he made a movement to throw himself in an agony of remorse at her feet and implore forgiveness. Had Francisca stood still for ten seconds longer, he had been saved, on the brink of the precipice. Had she only known it, Francisca would have stood like a rock, though her feet had been in fire. But she *misinterpreted* the meaning of his movement. She thought he was going to embrace her. So thinking, she drew back with a forbidding gesture. And in an instant Tuer felt the impulse of evil upon him like a flood. Hard, rigid, cruel, pitiless, capable of anything, he became cold also to the core, and insensible to shame. Dropping his arms—and a tragedy of the soul had been enacted since he raised them—he gave a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders and lift of the eyebrows.

Then, slowly and deliberately, he said, "And, pray, of what earthly use would a paltry two hundred pounds be to me?"

Again did Francisca's eyes open wide. She shaded them with her hand for a few seconds, as though a strong light had struck her.

"Oh, was that it!" she exclaimed, in a voice that sounded strange.

After a momentary pause, she added, "I would gladly give you more, if I had it to give; but I cannot now, I dare not. In three or four months, though, I could send you five hundred pounds. Would that help you any, Philip?"

"No," he said, bluntly, "it would not. I must have what I want at once or not at all."

"How much do you want?"

"Oh, I do not want so very much. A paltry three thousand would set me up on a sheep-farm or a cattle-ranch, I dare say, in some out-of-the-way corner of the earth."

"Three thousand pounds! You extravagant fellow! You ought to go to some gold-diggings or diamond mines."

"Extravagant? I suppose you think I ought to go out and begin as a farm-hand, and work my way up, eh?" exclaimed Tuer, angrily.

"Indeed, I think nothing of the kind, and you know it, Philip. But how are you to raise the sum you name?"

"How, indeed, unless you help me? Your private fortune amounts, I believe, to the 'extravagant' sum of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. And you grudge me—me, your discarded lover, who is about to exile himself to the other side of the globe for your sake—a paltry three thousand pounds!"

He made this statement with a fine show of indignation, and he was not ashamed. Not so Francisca, whose face was crimson with unutterable shame.

"Nay, nay, you shall not say I grudge it you. It is not true. If I had it, you should have it, and ten times the amount, to spare you—me—both of us this. But my husband controls all my money affairs, as you very well know. Be reasonable—more, be honorable, Philip, for your own sake."

He saw and felt her humiliation at his abasement, and how she struggled to preserve her respect for him, and how intact she kept her sweet dignity, her tender graciousness. This was his torment, and it maddened him.

"Reasonable or not, I must have the money," he said, with savage resoluteness.

"*Must have?* Surely you do not threaten me? You are not *demanding* it, Philip? Say so, for God's sake!" cried Francisca, as a new horror flashed upon her.

As she spoke she advanced to him, put her hand lightly on his arm, and gazed appealingly into his face. He threw her hand away, not roughly—there was no need for that. He moved away a step. He looked at her steadily. His face was working with livid torment. He spoke, and his voice was hollow.

"I will put it any way you like, my lady, so long as you take my meaning. I—"

"No, no, no, not that! A black-mailer! Oh, my God! my Philip! No, no, I am mad—you are jesting only. But it is a cruel, cruel jest. Why do you, my Philip?" Her voice trembled, her tears fell fast.

"Tut, tut, be not a fool! The jest is yours, not mine."

"What! is it true, then? Philip Tuer—the Philip I loved—the Philip who loved me—my—Philip—Tuer—a—a—O—O—Muriel!" With a low moan, down on the floor she sank, and her senses fled.

Tuer raised her in his arms and carried her to a sofa, where she lay white and insensible. He stood looking at her with a fixed and earnest gaze; and as he looked on the woman he had so vilely treated, a change gradually came over his face. The stern, evil expression passed away; it became pitiful and tender. Finally his face began to work with pain and agony more dire than any racking of the nerves and muscles.

Suddenly he cried aloud, "Villain, villain that I am! Oh, God, that it should have come to this! Had I foreseen this a year ago, aye, a month, a week ago, I would have shot myself first. That a man like David Reed—d—— him to the lowest hell!—a little, conscientious, self-righteous devil, without sympathy, without imagination, without pity, with his ignorant prejudices, his class contempt, with his taunts and his sneers, should have driven and nerved me to this devilish conduct! Oh Francisca, Francisca, I am done for now! You loved me, poor sweet thing—best of your kind on earth! You respected me. I have killed it all now, and what is left worth keeping? Through with it now to the end I will go. I will—I will, David Reed!"

Now was his face set like brass, and a look of hatred shone in his eyes. Francisca opened her beautiful eyes, and, catching sight of his face, she shuddered. Tuer saw it. He was already outcast from the feast of goodness, love, and hope; but that shudder of Francisca was as the loud closing of the great doors, cutting off every sparkle of light, and dooming him to endless darkness and woe. Francisca rose to her feet, and passed her hands over her eyes, as one coming out of a deep sleep. She gazed at him for some moments in a curious, wit-benumbed manner, without speaking.

At length she said, in a voice that was almost a whisper: "I do not think I know you. You are not Philip Tuer; he was a gentleman—honorable, chivalrous, tender—oh, so tender and loving! And now he is dead—my poor Philip is dead!"

With that she fell a-sobbing most bitterly. He waited till the paroxysm had spent itself.

Then he said: "Now listen, and be sensible. Will you let me have the money in a month?"

"Will you not believe me, then, when I say it is impossible? Oh, if I could, I would gladly! Philip, are you sure you are not mad? Would to God you were mad, only raving mad, Philip!"

"So I am, raving mad. So will I brew a madman's storm, my lady—one that will carry away with it, like so many dead leaves, my life, your life, and what you set a greater price on, your reputation, your all!"

"No, no; you would never do that, I know!"

"Then maybe it would have been better had your baby-girl never been born."

She gazed at him then with a new access of horror.

"O God, God! and is my child to suffer for my sins?" she cried, in anguish of soul.

Said Tuer, cold and merciless as an inquisitor, for he felt that he was treading hard after revenge now: "Not if you are a wise woman. If you have not money, you have jewels."

"Yes, yes; thank Heaven, yes—my jewels!" exclaimed Francisca, with wild eagerness.

"Do not be in too great a hurry; think of it. You wore them last night at the Gladioberts' ball, I suppose? Very good. You will not need them again for some months, perhaps? Just so. But time flies quickly—use a little imagination, please—and when you next need you won't have them. Do you not think their loss would be quickly discovered? It would easily be shown that you had not lodged them with the bank. Then there would be music in the air, I fancy! Is it not so?"

"Yes, yes," murmured Francisca, despairingly.

"Now, listen, please. I know that the bank clerk—"

"Your father-in-law?"

"Yes, my father-in-law," said Tuer, in his most cultured tones, while his eyes shone dangerously. "I love him, you know," he continued. "Well, he is waiting to receive your jewels, is he not?"

Francisca nodded her head in assent.

"All I ask of you is this: keep him here another forty minutes. When he gets to Heron's Wood it will be dusk, and the honest old fellow is weak-sighted. If a robbery occurred there, it would not be the first time such a thing had happened. Now,

think of the baby-girl, Francisca, and keep him forty minutes longer. That is all I ask. Is it a bargain? I see it is. And so good-bye and farewell forever."

Francisca watched him cross the lawn and enter the shrubbery; then she stood thinking for a while.

"Cruel—wicked—wicked—but my child, my child! Oh, my Muriel, I will do it! I would do it a hundred times over for thy sake!" she murmured, with love unutterable in her voice.

CHAPTER IX.

OF WHAT THE OWL SAW.

It was twilight in the pastures watered by the winding trout-stream of lofty origin. The sleek cattle, fast becoming black embossments of the land, were standing grazing in cool content. Though feminine, they were touched with divine philosophy, and counted in the gloaming that the world was good. It was their world, beyond a doubt. The grass in it was juicy, and there was plenty of it; delicious, also, was the water of the babbling stream. The glorious sun, that was a trifle too warm at full height, had lowered himself with lordly courtesy and gone away for a while, in order that they might cool off a bit, and ease their blinking eyes, and see things in a different light. The vanished gnats and flies stirred now but the faintest ripples in the deep, dead sea of their bovine memory. And the most wonderful thing, to their thinking, was the gentle forethought whereby nature had provided them with a race of attendants so handy and intelligent as were the laughing, talking, two-legged animals, who gave each other names and called themselves men. This singular race of almost hairless parasites had developed hands, with fingers specially adapted for seizing and pressing the teats; and no sooner were their udders swollen with the juice of life than straightway came to their sides these chattering bipeds, and with marvellous instinct dexterously extracted the blessed fluid and drank it with relish. Yes; any one with two large, mild eyes could see that the great cow-world scheme of things came pretty near perfection.

In the heart of the holly-bush sat the big brown owl, wondering with wide-open eyes whether it was a waking reality or a vision of sleep that he beheld. For right under him was a man's head, and below the head were a couple of hands, and in the hands were several curious things that glinted with light at every turn. These were placed carefully in a hole in the ground, lined with dry leaves, and covered over with a care that obliterated every trace of the performance. Then the head and hands vanished, melted out of sight altogether; while the holly-leaves came together and put on a brave show of amity and brotherly kindness, albeit there was no jostling, no caressing, no rubbing of noses together, or laying of cheek by cheek, but a stately reserve and distance, and a respect for each other's points.

The owl was neither timid nor superstitious, but he had nerves, together with a set of experiences and a set of beliefs; beyond these boundaries of the known stretched the broad daylight of the unknown, the stalking-grounds of mystery and terror. He was not accustomed to seeing human heads and hands under his perch in the holly-bush. The whole thing was uncanny. Was it apparition, or dream? Dream of course, and yet—he was awake. Was he awake then? Was he quite sure he was awake now? “Oo—hoo!” he cried, frightened at his own thoughts. And the next moment he rushed forth on the wing, and in his blind terror would have struck Philip Tuer full in the face had he not sprung aside and let him pass.

“Confound the thing! A bird of evil omen,” exclaimed Tuer, himself a bit startled. He was laden with his fishing-tackle and his fish. He kept to the fields for a good mile, following no paths, but making a straight line. He came on to the road from Fellby to Dunrigg within a few hundred yards of the “Pack Horse.” A cheerful fire blazed in the common-room of the inn, and as Tuer passed in front of the window, the blind of which was undrawn, he halted a moment and peeped in. He entered the inn, and, going into the fire-lighted room, rang the bell and ordered some brandy.

“Would you like to step into the best room, sir?” inquired the hostess, who knew young Mr. Tuer very well, seeing that he often called when he was out fishing, and, indeed, kept a rod and line at the inn.

“No, thank you. I am staying only a minute or two. I have had a long fish on Dunrigg, and am a bit weary.”

"And I hope you had good sport, sir," said the landlady.

"Yes, pretty good. About a dozen, I think."

"Aye! my, sir, but that's a pretty good catch!"

"The fish are fond of me, you see," laughed Tuer, and the woman went out laughing. Then Tuer seemed to make a discovery. He was raising the glass to his lips when his eyes wandered to a corner where, on a high-backed settle, was a man sitting with his feet up and his knees under his chin.

"Holloa, shepherd! is that you?" exclaimed Tuer, in a tone of surprise.

"Es, sir, it's me, and no mistake," grinned the man familiar with lambs. He was not drunk by any means; still he had a lot of beer in him, and sleep hung about his head like mists about Dunrigg. He saw things hazily, and the only speck of clear consciousness he had was that a gentleman was in the room, and it was his duty not to forget it. Tuer chatted with him for barely ten minutes, and then, hearing a step, rose as if to go. The door opened, and in came the police sergeant, with whom Tuer had walked some hours earlier in the direction of Dunrigg.

He saluted Tuer, and said, "Getting back from the pond, sir?"

"Yes," answered Tuer, emptying his glass.

"Any luck, sir?"

"Here they are," replied Tuer, opening his creel and displaying his catch of yesterday.

"My stars, but what beauties! Ah, but it makes a man hungry to look at them!" quoth the sergeant, admiringly.

With that Tuer pulled forth a splendid fish, and laying it on the table, said, "Take that, sergeant, with my compliments."

And the officer whipped out a great red-and-blue handkerchief, and popped the carp into it, and put them both into his coat-pocket in less time than it took him to express his thanks. Tuer looked at his watch and uttered a "dear me" of surprise.

"Why, shepherd," he said, "how long do you think I have been here?"

"Dunno, sir."

Then with a look of deep calculation on his face, he added, "I should reckon, sir, making so bold, sir, you might a bin here some forty minutes, seeing how dry I've become."

He winked hard at the sergeant, who saw as one who saw not, and kept his dignity stiff as his leather collar. Tuer laughed and

rang the bell, and ordered a quart of the best ale and three glasses. He poured out a glass each for the two men, and half a glass for himself.

"Your health," he said.

"Your health, sir—your health, sir," responded sergeant and shepherd, drinking.

"It is 8.30, and—shepherd, you were nearly right. I have been here forty-five minutes. Good-night."

Outside, he walked leisurely enough until the "Pack Horse" was some distance behind. Then he put on speed, and drew towards Fellby at a swinging pace.

"I wonder which will be first? I fancy I shall beat him after all. Forty-five minutes—the muddle-headed donkey! I was there just seventeen minutes. That is a gain of twenty-eight minutes in a question of time," he said to himself, as he passed the first lamp-post within the town limits.

When Tuer reached the grass-covered mound overlooking the cottage he entered the summer-house that stood in the middle and sat down. If ever a man felt fagged he did. For the last six hours he had been walking, running, jumping against time. Moreover, he had gone through a couple of scenes—one, as he said to himself, slow and tragical; the other, swift and comical—that were, in all conscience, enough for a man's nerves in one day. From where he sat he could see that there was a light in the small dining-room of the cottage. There was also a light in David Reed's bedroom. This bedroom light troubled him.

"It looks as if he has got home first. I hope not; and yet I don't know that it matters much anyway. No, no; he was too far gone, and it was too dark just there. Yet when he plucked at my false beard, the old scamp gave a beastly significant gasp, and swooned right off. Well, he cannot prove anything, and I can. Nothing like having a couple of good, honest donkeys of witnesses on one's side. Yet what a fool am I! Held my honor—the jewel of a man's life—cheap as dirt! My gentleman's pride hath made a villain of me. For thou art a villain, Philip Tuer, thou art now a villain. Dost relish thy inward state, old soul? dear old chum? dear old humbug? Well, I must in, and wear a bold face modestly."

Following his thoughts, Tuer rose to his feet and made for the

house. He listened outside for a few moments, and his hand shook as he turned the handle of the door.

"Is that you, father?" cried Janet from above.

"No, it's me," answered Tuer, treating grammar, as he did more important things at times, with familiar contempt.

"Oh, I am so glad, dear! I will be down soon," responded Janet.

She came down in a few minutes, dressed for her husband in a pretty pink silk gown, his favorite color for his wife, even as blue and gold were his choice for the Countess. It was cut low, also to hit his taste, and showed her lovely white throat and chest to perfection. Her sweet face was tinted with bewitching color, was animated with pleasure, and her eyes sparkled with love, the best light of beauty. As she came to him and put her arms round his neck and kissed him, Tuer called to mind the "as water unto wine" comparison that Francisca had made between Janet's beauty and her own. It was true, proudly and indisputably true. Nevertheless, Janet's beauty was real, and her charm was strong. Her face was refinement itself; and though she lacked the breeding and polish, the mannered dignity and elegant self-confidence of the woman of fashion, there was no taint of vulgarity in her. Every feature was pure, and in no word or act did she jar upon the sensitive nerves of her fastidious husband. Her intelligence was bright in his eyes, sound her judgement, loyal her affection, sweet her temper, and worthy of ladyhood her tastes, her instincts, her ideals, and her ambitions.

Together alone, away from the irritating prejudices of that honest, gentle-hearted, opinionated little bigot, David Reed, who was as stern and proud in his class prejudices and proclivities as any aristocrat—away also from the peculiar framework of English society with its galling, if necessary, restrictions and distinctions—Tuer and Janet would have fitted each other first-rate, and might have achieved domestic felicity in a degree, like Darby and Joan, or John Anderson my jo, John, to be commemorated in verse, to point a moral or adorn a tale. Indeed, like most of us unsung mortals, they had in them the raw material of the heroic and the epic, lacking only the fire, of outward fortune, or inward force, necessary for the transformation of the siliceous earths and kaolin of the commonplace into the translucent porcelain of the sublime. Peradventure it is of Heaven's grace that

we manage so cleverly to miss the celestial process of vitrification, seeing that it is mighty hard work to play porcelain and not get broken. Mayhap we are better off in our natural state as china clays, ground flints, and calcined bones.

Said Tuer, admiringly, "You look very well, Jan, this evening. Pretty as a picture."

A word of commendation from her husband went a long way with poor Janet. Her face broke into a happy smile as she answered, "I am very glad, darling, if you think so. Where have you been so long?"

"On Dunrigg. Look here."

He opened the creel and showed her the carp. And great was her joy thereat.

"We shall not want any butcher's meat for a week," she exclaimed, her mind running naturally on household economies.

Said Tuer, laughingly, "Then I am sorry I stayed so long, and caught so many; for I am fond of a cutlet of mutton, wife."

"And you shall have one for your tea—as a reward. Would you like it now, dear, or will you wait a bit till father comes home? He cannot be long now."

"Why, where has he gone?" asked Tuer, playing with his wife's ear in a manner that filled her heart with gladness.

"He has gone somewhere on business. Stramon Court way, I think," answered Janet, with loyal caution. Somehow, to-night, it fretted her that she could not be perfectly open with her husband in the matter.

She added, "I don't understand why he is so late. Something must have detained him longer than he expected. He said he should be home about half-past six."

"He will turn up all right soon, like a bad penny, you will see. We will wait for him, if you like."

This willingness to wait was another thing that pleased Janet, and lent happiness to her spirit. For she loved both the ill-matched men with all her soul; and hard and delicate was her daily task of keeping things running smoothly, of mollifying unknit tempers, of allaying petty jealousies, that grew and would have stung like nettles.

"Thank you, dearest," she murmured, giving him a look worth many mutton cutlets.

"Come here, sweet," he said, seating himself. He took her on

his knee, kissed her white throat and chest, and played with the ring that witnessed his right to fondle the beautiful girl.

"Did you think I had forgotten the promise I made you the night before last?"

"About Jakes & Petto?" she said, a bit shyly.

"Yes."

"To tell truth, love, I wondered whether your courage would hold out."

"I thought so, you naughty girl. Kiss me. You do not know me yet, I see. Well, I have seen them."

"You have! Oh, you precious boy! What did they say?"

"The berth they offered me through your dear father is filled up. There will be a vacancy, however, in three weeks' time, and they will let me have it."

She kissed him, with tears in her eyes. "Was it very dreadful?" she asked, whisperingly.

"I am alive, you see, at any rate. I saw young Petto only. Janet, if I saw that fellow every day for a fortnight, I should either kill him or myself, I am certain. Had they offered a baronetcy instead of a knighthood to my father, you might some day, Janet, have been Lady Tuer. Now you will be Mrs. Tuer, wife of Philip Tuer, seedsman's clerk."

"Never mind, love, we shall be happy; and that is— Hark! Who is that?"

A strange shuffling kind of step was heard outside. Some one opened the door into the narrow entrance-hall.

"Why, it must be father," cried Janet, springing up to open the door of the room.

CHAPTER X.

OF A MIRACLE THAT DID NOT HAPPEN.

THE door opened, and David Reed staggered into the room. His face was ghastly white, and his eyes were bloodshot. He had no hat on his head, and his clothes were badly soiled; a clot of mud lay on his left shoulder, while a withered leaf was entangled in his hair. He carried a stick in his right hand, on which he seemed to lean heavily, and his left hand clutched firmly the handle of a small leather bag. Altogether, he looked a very woe-begone figure. As he came in, Tuer, with a sudden clutching sensation at his throat, rose to his feet, and for a moment their eyes met. Janet sprang forward with a cry.

"Father, what is it? Are you ill? Your clothes—your face—speak, dear!"

"Why, Mr. Reed, what's up? Holloa, he is going to faint! Quick, Janet, brandy, brandy!" cried Tuer, catching the old man as he swayed and was about to fall, and lowering him gently into his high-backed arm-chair. They gave him some brandy, which he drank, and leaned back in his chair with closed eyes. Presently he revived, sat up, opened his eyes, and looked about the room in a dazed fashion.

"Do you feel better, love?" inquired Janet, tenderly stroking her father's head.

"Yes, yes; I shall be all right soon, now," he answered. He looked hard at Tuer for some time without speaking.

At length he said, in a tone of surprise, "You here, too, eh?"

"So it seems," replied Tuer, smiling.

"Why, father, what do you mean? Where else should he be?" said Janet, softly.

"I don't know, lass; I don't know."

Then, in a low tone, as if speaking to himself, he added, "Perhaps I was mistaken—who knows? It doesn't seem likely—and yet—I must be mistaken—I must—for her sake."

Whispered Janet to her husband, "Is he wandering, Philip? Won't you go for the doctor?"

"If you wish. But I fancy he will—"

Broke out David Reed, suddenly, in a loud voice, "My bag—d'ye hear, child?—where's my bag?"

Answered Janet, in a trembling voice, "Why, father, it is still in your hand. Let me put it down for you?"

But David Reed clutched his bag with both hands, and cried out, sternly, "Mind your own business, Janet, and don't you put a finger on this bag."

Then in a lower key, "Ah, if the good Lord hadn't come to my aid, I shouldn't have had it in my hand this moment—should I, son-in-law?"

There was irony in his question—fierce, bitter irony. There was accusation, strong and fearless, in the steady look of his eyes. Tuer noted both, and he had the sensation of standing on the edge of a chasm. He put his hands into his pockets, smiled, as if with contemptuous wonder, and said, "How the deuce should I know? Did any one try to take it from you, then?"

"Ha, ha!" laughed the old man, cunningly, "that's the question. Did they, or did they not? You can't answer it, can you?"

Janet looked at her husband appealingly, being almost frightened. She quite thought her father had lost his wits and gone clean out of his mind; that probably was the cause of his lateness. He had been wandering about demented.

Said Tuer, coldly, "I do not understand you, sir. Hadn't you better try and tell us what has happened? That is, if anything has happened other than a confusion of your intellect."

David Reed gave a laugh that sent a cold shiver through his daughter.

"If—if—if anything has happened! That is excellent wit, excellent wit. Janet, lass, I will tell you what has happened—son-in-law there won't care a brass button to hear it. Give me some more brandy. That's it, that's it."

He drank the spirit with avidity, and smacked his lips, and thought he felt strength running mysteriously through his weak frame. So potent is the divine drug—Imagination. Tuer leaned with his elbow on the mantel-piece, the heel of his left foot up and his right hand in his trousers-pocket. He turned his face

from the fire and fixed his glance on the old man. He looked a bit amused, and more bored.

Said David Reed, "Well, Janet, somebody—never mind who—was engaged a long while, and I had to wait till she was free. I saw her put them into their cases, and put the cases into my bag here. Then she locked the bag and put the key into her pocket—the other key is at the bank, you know. Next she gave me the bit of crisp paper I told you of, as usual, and back I started for home. When I got to Heron's Wood it was dusk, and in the dingle it seemed pretty dark. As I entered the dingle I pulled out my watch and could just make out the time—my eyes are not so strong as they once were, you know, Janet. It was just twenty-eight minutes past seven, so I know the time, you see. Well, just as I got out of the dingle I was suddenly seized from behind, an arm was thrown round my neck and a handkerchief, reeking with chloroform, was pressed against my mouth and nose."

"Oh, horrible, horrible!" exclaimed Janet, trembling with excitement.

"My stars, but it sounds interesting now!" chimed in Tuer, standing erect, with both hands in his pockets, and the ghost of a smile lurking in the corners of his mouth.

Continued David Reed, "Well, child, I struggled hard; but I am only a weak man now, and the rogue who held me was strong. I sank to the ground wellnigh insensible. But I held on to the bag. God be thanked, I held on to the bag! else were I now a ruined man. Nay, child, speak not, but hear me out. I felt the rogue trying to pull it out of my hand, and opening my eyes I made a sudden clutch at his beard—at his beard, son-in-law—and do you know, son-in-law, it came right off his face—and his face was like—"

He paused.

"Like what, sir?" demanded Tuer sternly, with knitted eyebrows.

"Son-in-law, he had a dimple in his chin for all the world like yours."

"For shame, father! That is too bad of you," cried Janet, and then she poured upon her husband, with one look of her eyes, a flood of very proudest love. And answering to her eloquent eyes, as she thought, Tuer magnanimously put aside the insult, and with it his frown and his stern tone.

He gave a good hearty laugh and said, "I hope that not on that

account, Mr. Reed, you will henceforth hold a dimpled chin for the sign of a villain. By-the-bye, I thought you said it was dark at the time?"

"There was light enough to see that, at any rate. His face was close to mine. Oh, I saw it plainly enough. But it was only for a moment. The rogue pulled my hat down over my eyes, I think, and held the handkerchief to my face again, and I went off like a top."

"And the jewels, the jewels, father, have you lost them?" inquired Janet, anxiously.

"No, no; thank God, no, Janet! It was a miracle, child, a miracle, if ever there was one. Would you believe it? when I came to my senses the bag was still in my hand unopened, uninjured, untouched. It was a miracle, a blessed miracle, child. The rogue had gone. I fancy he must have heard, or thought he heard, somebody coming, and have taken to his heels before he could get the bag out of my strong grip. I know not, I care not. Heaven saved me at the last moment, and that is enough."

"Who knows, Mr. Reed, but what he was even conscience-stricken of a sudden? I believe that even the worst of criminals are liable to these sudden qualms," observed Tuer, gravely.

"Perhaps it was only a practical joke, eh, son-in-law?"

"That is true. Looking to the end of it, one may see in it only a practical joke," replied Tuer, in the tone of a man who suddenly sees a subject in a new light.

"Yes, yes; a joke, a piece of rough humor, a bit of reckless fun," said David Reed, not wholly in irony, for his mind pathetically sought a hiding-place from the pitiless truth.

Addressing Janet, who stood pale and excited by his side, he said, "Before I put them away I must have a look at them. I'm that nervous and shaken, child, I can't rest till I've seen them safe and sound with my own eyes."

He rose to his feet and appeared giddy.

"You are not well enough to move yet, father. Sit down, dear," cried Janet, much distressed.

"No, no; loose me, child. I am better now. I'll just step down to the bank and get the key of the bag. Janet, here, hold this bag, and keep hold of it till I come back. I sha'n't be more than a few minutes. Do not you stir from this room nor loose that bag till I get back."

"Oh, father!" pleaded Janet, as she took the bag, "don't go alone; you are not fit to. Let me go with you."

"Mind you the bag," roared the old man, sternly.

"Then let Philip go with you, dearest. Oh, do, please!"

Then to her husband, "Philip, dear, you won't let him go alone?"

Tuer made a movement as if to accompany David Reed; but the latter, who was already in the door-way, turned, and giving Tuer a curious look, said, "Nay, nay; stay where you are, son-in-law. I want you not with me. I am thinking I shall be quite as safe alone, son-in-law. Look to that bag, Janet."

With that he closed the door behind and went out.

Said Tuer, "I do not know, wife, but it seems to me that your dear father is about off his head. You hear his innuendoes, his insinuations. They are d—— polite, to say the least of it."

Janet put the bag upon the table, and ran to her husband to throw her arms about his neck, and beg of him to forgive the cruel words that were surely born of her father's disordered imagination. Tuer met her with upraised hands, and thrust her gently back.

"My faith," he exclaimed, "you are a fine guardian of precious treasure! Your hands have loosed the bag. You are a lost soul. Seize it, seize it, ere it is too late!"

He pushed her to the table, and she took hold of the bag again. She looked up in her husband's face with eyes full of perfect love and confidence.

"Oh, darling!" she cried, with quivering mouth, "don't be bitter with him. Forgive him, my love. He is not himself. He knows not what he says. Think of what he has gone through. Pity him—forgive him—for my sake, husband."

Then she drew close to him, and as his arms went round her, her pent-up feeling broke loose, and laying her head upon his breast, she sobbed violently.

Said Tuer, presently: "Listen, he is coming back. Dry your tears, wife."

She was engaged in this interesting operation when her father came in.

"It never happened but once before, never!" he exclaimed, in an excited manner. "I deserve to lose a quarter's salary, if ever a man did in this world. Give me the bag, Janet."

“What is it, father? What is the matter?” asked Janet, nervous, and a prey to fresh alarm.

“Matter, indeed! If the rogue had only known it. I was nearly at the bank, when I put my hand into my waistcoat-pocket here, and God bless me if there wasn’t the key of the bag! If they cashiered me to-morrow I should get no more than my deserts,” said David Reed, excitedly.

“I would not exaggerate a small matter like that, if I were you, Mr. Reed. A mere oversight on your part, I presume. Though, of course, under some circumstances it might bear a suspicious aspect,” remarked Tuer, with a barely audible note of mockery in his voice.

Janet did not catch it, but her father did.

“Eh, son-in-law, what’s that?” he said, quickly.

Then, to Janet, “It was the senior partner himself who got the bag out of the safe two days ago. He opened it and saw it was all right, and then he locked it and gave me the key to put away. I remember now. I was very busy just then, getting ready to start. I slipped it into my pocket, and there it has been ever since. Yes, my memory is going from me. I forgot all about it till I felt it in my pocket just now. I deserve—”

“Never mind, dear,” interrupted Janet, drawing her father’s chair to the table. “Let us be thankful you have not lost it, that things are not worse than they are.”

She knew only too well that the young old man was breaking down.

Said David Reed, as he fumbled with the key and the lock, “I did the same thing once before, soon after I began to carry them. I thought—ha, there they are! Look, Janet, look! aren’t they lovely cases?”

One at a time, he pulled from the bag and laid upon the table four dainty jewel-cases, plush-covered, blue, gold, and crimson in color. Janet, leaning on the back of her father’s chair, exclaimed in admiration. Whereupon Tuer, who was standing behind her with his foot on the fender, moved a step or two nearer the table.

David Reed turned his head sharply half round towards him, and said, bitingly, “Yes, son-in-law, this once you may look at them. After to-day I carry them never again—no, not for a thousand pounds a journey. Nay, Janet, don’t touch. You may look, but you must not touch.”

Tuer made no remark but stood with folded arms, and on his face was an expression of disdain.

David Reed took in his hands a blue circular case, and with his thumb on the spring, he said, "Now this—this has in it the wonderful collar of diamonds I told you about. Get ready, Janet; I am going to open it just for five seconds, to make sure. It will flash like—that!"

He opened the case dramatically, and—*it was empty!*

Cried Tuer, with every accent of surprise, "By George, it's empty!"

"Oh, oh, oh!" gasped Janet, covering her eyes with both hands.

David Reed went ghastly white, gasped, rose from his seat, spread his hands in the air, staggered, but said not a word, and made no cry. Suddenly he seized the cases and opened them all, one after the other. They were all empty. Then, with an awful cry, he raised his arm heavenwards, exclaiming, "Oh, my God!—then it's true!"

Janet went to him, put her hand on his arm, and said, "Father mine, don't let—"

David Reed turned from her, and going up to Tuer, said, in a piteous tone of anguish, "Son-in-law, you didn't mean it seriously, I know. It was only a joke of yours. You meant only to—"

"Why, d—— it, man, what do you mean? Do you think I stole your trash?" demanded Tuer, fiercely.

"No, no," whined the old man, "I know you too well. You are a gentleman. You are the son of a gentleman. You are my child's husband. A joke's a joke. But oh, for Heaven's sake, carry it no further! I'm willing to forget it—to laugh at it—to—"

Cried Tuer, with a bitter laugh, "You silly old idiot! You think you can come that stale trick with me? The thief is the man who had the key in his—"

"Oh, hush, hush! don't, my husband!" exclaimed Janet, putting her hand upon his mouth.

Said David Reed, almost quietly, "Philip Tuer, d'ye mean it, then? Ye meant to rob me? Ye mean to ruin me—me, your own wife's father?"

Like a wounded lioness did Janet turn on her father with, "How dare you? how dare you? Are you mad? My husband a highway robber!"

Broke out David Reed, "And it's *her* husband, it's *her* husband! I'm ruined, ruined, ruined!"

He sank with his head upon the table, sobbing like a child.

CHAPTER XI.

OF THE TOUCH OF TRAGEDY.

FELLBY was a small town and dull; nestling under the fells, even the railway had to throw out a loop line and make a great curve to get within reach of it. It heard of large towns with pity, and of gay towns without envy. There was once a toad on the earth with a body as large as an ox, and a name of the same dimensions. Fellby surveyed through the haze of rumor a town like London much as a little modern *Bufo vulgaris* might contemplate the monstrous form of an ancient Labyrinthodon. That is, with wonder, with horror, with sober doubt that both could be included under the common denomination of Town.

A big town might be rich, well lighted, clever, and amusing; these qualities were problematical, but not so its wickedness. That was certain. Big towns ran to wickedness as naturally as grasses seeded. Fellby was quiet, orderly, and respectable. Being eminently evangelical, it had perforce to acknowledge to wickedness of a mild, theoretical order. Of actual wickedness it had very little, and the little had to go a long way. It was spread fine, as are the precious leaves of the gold-beater.

When, therefore, it was noised abroad that on the previous evening David Reed, the embodied genius of Fellby Bank, had been waylaid in Heron's Wood, and robbed of jewels worth thousands of pounds belonging to Lady Eden, Fellby was horror-struck, and asked itself, devoutly, could such things be? The shock was great, greater than any it had experienced since that fateful and historic 5th of November, over eight score years ago, when sixteen hundred Scotch and Northumberland rebels marched into their loyal town and wickedly proclaimed the Pretender with blasts of the bugle.

So long as the criminal was pictured as a native and a resi-

dent of the place, Fellby was conscious of a sense of painful humiliation and shame. It had a sinister foreboding of impending disaster, of being catalogued morally with certain modern toad-like towns of great size and evil fame; and this, without being able to boast the miserable worldly compensation that attaches to wealth, and gay society, and well-lighted streets. Beyond question, something was rotten in the corporation of Fellby. It should be sought out before greater evil came upon them.

They sought and found. Some found that their worthy mayor, instead of being a teetotaller, was a wine merchant. Others found that instead of being a Dissenter, he was a Churchman. Others, that instead of being a Tory, he was a Whig. The lanterns of criticism were all alight, and their dim, defective rays fell upon the aldermen, the councillors, the bench of magistrates, the police force, the gas company, the water company, the school board, the town-clerk, the vicar, the curate, the curate's wife—she read novels from the circulating library at the post-office—and last, but not least, the tower of the parish church. This last was in a sad state of dilapidation, and cried aloud for stone and mortar, but no man heeded it, and now retribution had come.

Having sought and found, Fellby said that it was ashamed of itself, and, if its virtue had not been of a superior kind, there could be no doubt that its all-round delinquency would have revealed itself sooner, and in a worse form. This was some comfort; but it was more comfort when Fellby, after deep cogitation, conceived the brilliant idea that the daring criminal was not a native at all, nor even a resident, but practically a foreigner, a man from one of those overgrown cities of corruption, who had come in along their loop line together with other products of civilization. So long as it did not grow, nor harbor, nor was in any way responsible for the board and lodging of the criminal, Fellby did not feel particularly humiliated by the crime. Fairly applied, indeed, the squeezers of logic were able to crush out of the crime some of the soothing syrup of virtue. For did not its commission argue the existence of a facility that was one of the signs of innocence and virtue? Did not the criminal, in a word, compliment them by choosing their locality as the safest, because the least suspicious, for his daring deed?

Then, again, by shutting one eye to the wickedness of this illegal transference of property, and by shutting the other eye to the

personal violence attending the act, Fellby could see clearly that an extraordinary event had happened. The incident was sensational and romantic; there were jewels of great value in it, and a live countess, celebrated for her beauty and wealth in the world of wealth and beauty. These were picturesque elements in the story, to say nothing of the dingle in Heron's Wood, and the antique figure of the old and faithful bank clerk. And though Fellby was a little severe on the curate's wife, and her frequent demands upon the resources of the library at the post-office, it had a sneaking fondness for the quality of romance in life, real and fictitious. This view of the matter, the æsthetic rather than the ethical, was rather piquant; it elbowed its way to the front, thrust the less pleasing view into the background, sat on every tongue, worked in every fancy, and finally ruled sole and supreme; an illustration of that artistic piece of doctrine that finds its justification in all things, good and bad alike, that live and thrive, known as the survival of the fittest.

From an early hour Lacklandgate was crowded—congestion of the alimentary canal. In front of the gray bank building was a solid, yet light, mass of humanity. And now a dark riddle was made plain, and men saw clearly why the old "Blue Dragon" inn stood where it stood. It formed an open duct into which many obstructed pieces of humanity were carried, some many times, from the over-crowded alimentary canal. On that day the "Blue Dragon" justified its existence, and drove a rattling trade. Early in the afternoon the excitement was deepened when it became known that an official visit had been paid to the scene of the robbery, and that an official inquiry was just taking place behind the iron shutters of the bank. Already the town was placarded and the streets littered with hand-bills, wherein was offered a reward of £500 for information leading to the apprehension of the highwayman, and another £500 for his conviction. This was a tempting bait, killing to the cupidity of the crowd. Scores of the wiser sort set off at once for the dingle in Heron's Wood, little doubting they would find the £1000 crouching under some bush or other, or squatting like a toad in a hollow tree.

Suddenly the bell in the old tower of the parish church began tolling, and as its solemn and funeral notes fell upon the ears of the itching multitude they felt that the crisis had arrived. It capped their wonder with awe, and lent to their excitement some-

thing of a religious character. A few divined, what was the fact, that a simple funeral was about to take place. But to the many it seemed only natural, under the circumstances, that the church bell should toll. If the vicar had appeared in his surplice and begun to read the service for the dead they would have felt that the occasion was being fitly improved, while their comfortable feeling that something serious had happened would have been yet further tinged with the mystic color of devotion.

In a back room at the bank an adjourned inquiry into the circumstances of the robbery was taking place. Heron's Wood had been visited by the bank officials and the police, and it was rumored that an important discovery had been made. In the room were the two proprietors of the bank, the manager, a couple of magistrates, the chief constable, the town-clerk, the mayor, the solicitor to the bank, and David Reed. In another room was Janet, and with her, in semi-official capacity as they felt, were the privileged wives of his honor the mayor and his reverence the vicar. The good ladies meant to be sympathetic and comforting, whereas they were only inquisitive and irritating. A man would have wished them at the devil; poor Janet, being only a gentle woman, harbored not profane thoughts. She could not swear, she could only suffer.

In the passages and about the doors stood sundry policemen, stiff, upright, chock-full of dummy dignity. For minutes at a time they were together alone, overlooked by no profane eye. They might have winked at each other, poked each other's ribs, thrust their tongues in their cheeks, and have growled a low "Ha! ha!" These things do her Majesty's judges, of course, when they retire from the bench, otherwise they would fade away and die miserably of a strange and horrible disease peculiar to men too full of the ripeness of wisdom and gravity. But though judges may save themselves alive and preserve their sanity by grinning at each other in private, not so the constables of Fellby. They winked not, neither did they grin, but stood in solemn and majestic silence, images of unjointed dignity, and they met each other's eyes with the same sublime expression as that with which they gazed on the drab-tinted walls.

They felt that this was their time, their place, their circumstance. The unities were on their side. The dramatic instinct is good, the dramatic art is better. Feeling, they tried to look

tragic. They failed. In consequence, they looked comic; and this was an exquisite success. They were, indeed, in the neighborhood of the tragic, only it passed them clean by and touched them not. But one it did touch, and that heavily. Now, the touch of tragedy is awful, if for no other reason than that it brings to the test the peculiar quality of a man's nature. Like fire, it may subliminate or shrivel. It sets once and forever the mark of nobility or baseness upon its victim.

David Reed looked ten years older than he did twenty-four hours ago. He was as certain that Philip Tuer had done the deed as that he was alive; but for Janet's sake he had come to the decision of keeping the terrible secret locked in his own bosom. "The thief is the man who had the key in his pocket," were Tuer's words, and David Reed felt their force. Apart from Tuer there was no robber in existence, which meant that no robber would be traced, no robber would be found. If not to-day, to-morrow, in the multitude of theories that would inevitably spring up, there would be one that would take root, slowly maybe but surely, and would live, and grow and grow until, beneath its frightful shadow, he would wither and die, and his memory would rot. The old man shuddered at the thought, and moaned aloud. Yet it was better so, he thought. If the blow fell on his son-in-law, and was directed by him, David Reed, her own father, as it needs must be, then would the girl Janet fade like a frost-nipped flower, and skill would fail to keep the life in her. And he would be left alone, with the honor that he had hugged closer than his child's happiness and life. Would it not sting him like an adder in his bosom? His honor was precious—it was his all. Ah, God, he would have died right joyously to save it! But blast his child's life for it! No, no; it was better that his own memory should rot. So the old man went forth to face the ordeal. Now, this was the touch of tragedy: did it mark him noble or base?

For the second time that day he stood up and carefully rehearsed, for the benefit of his listeners, every incident of the journey and the attack. Just as he had finished the door opened and Philip Tuer walked in. There was a momentary buzz of excitement at this unexpected intrusion, but it subsided quickly for various reasons. His relationship to David Reed was one reason. Another was that he was the son of Squire Tuer, who might have been Sir Philip Tuer, but that his pride, which reached unto a

baronetcy, could not stomach a barren knighthood. Yet another reason, and perhaps the strongest, was the bearing of the man himself. This hinted nothing of kinship with squire or bank clerk, but heralded himself proudly and sternly. He had come on his own account beyond doubt. And when a man so comes, there can be no question of his right to come. There is standing-room for him always, on every battle-field and play-ground of life.

Said the mayor, being the mayor, "We are glad to see you here, Mr. Tuer. Your father-in-law has just been giving us his account of this wicked, this daring, and, I may add, this most mysterious affair."

"Hear, hear! Most mysterious affair," chimed in Sir Reginald Burgundy, chairman of Quarter Sessions. And somehow the sense of mystery straightway deepened in all present, until it seemed to fill the room like smoke.

Tuer seated himself, and, crossing his legs, gazed with vexed brows upon an engraving on the opposite wall of a meet that he had more than once attended. Small attention he seemed to pay to the many questions with which the gentlemen assembled plied David Reed. The latter was feeling much as a toad under the harrow. As the questioning proceeded, his suffering became more acute. His nerves were raw, and soon were quivering with pain, as he caught the dreaded accent of doubt and snuffed the fatal odor of suspicion.

"Tell us, David Reed, have you yourself any idea as to who was the perpetrator of the robbery?"

It was the gruff and pompous voice of Sir Reginald Burgundy that now filled the room. For the first time Tuer took his eyes off the picture of the meet, and let them rest for an instant on the flushed face of Sir Reginald. Then he fixed his glance upon David Reed.

"May I presume that you mean, should I know the man again if I saw him, sir?" asked David Reed, feeling hard pressed.

Sir Reginald arched his eyebrows and pursed his mouth ere he said, "Well—well, I meant what I said, exactly. But, for the present, take it as you put it."

"Then, sir, yes. Yes, I should know him again. I could swear to him," answered David Reed, without hesitation.

"Indeed! So far, that is good. Now, Reed, will you allow me

to ask you one other question. Had you ever seen the man before?"

At this David Reed's face twitched oddly, and his hand, that rested on the chair behind which he stood, visibly trembled. He hesitated, and all eyes were fixed upon him.

"I should not like to swear that I had," came at length slowly from his lips.

"Why not?" pursued Sir Reginald.

Another pause; then, "Because I might be wrong."

"Then, although you are not sure, you think you know who the person was?"

David Reed made no answer.

"Why do you not answer the question?" said Sir Reginald, sternly.

"I cannot. I would rather not," replied David Reed, whose wit was almost smothered in his woe.

Sir Reginald Burgundy coughed. The mayor coughed. The town-clerk was about to do the same; but at that moment he caught the eye of Sir Reginald, and his courage failed him. He contented himself with exchanging a significant glance with the chief constable.

"David Reed, I put to you one more question. If you think that it would incriminate yourself in any degree, it is my duty to tell you, as a magistrate, that you are under no compulsion to answer it. Now, sir, tell me, who do you think was your assailant?"

A profound silence followed, painful to all except the worthy baronet, who felt pleased with his own perspicacity. The silence was presently broken in an unexpected manner.

Philip Tuer got onto his feet, and having met every man's eye in turn, said, in a calm, self-possessed manner, "I have no doubt, gentlemen, you think this is a very inopportune moment for me to obtrude myself upon your notice. But—you are mistaken. I will take upon myself the burden, Sir Reginald Burgundy, of answering the question you have just put to Mr. Reed. Mr. Reed thinks that the person who assaulted and robbed him in Heron's Wood was none other than—myself."

Exclamations of astonishment broke from all, while Sir Reginald threw up his white fat hands, palms outward, murmuring, "'Pon my soul, you don't say so, you don't say so!"

"I am here," continued Tuer, "to make answer before you all to that charge."

Then David Reed stretched forth his hand, and cried aloud, "Hold your tongue, son-in-law, hold your tongue. Have I breathed a syllable against you here?"

Answered Tuer, "Not here, but elsewhere, yes. You told me last night that when you pulled off the false beard of your assailant you recognized my face, my dimple, my eyes, sir."

Murmured David Reed as to himself, "Not a word about his eyes, not a word; but he knows — curious — he knows that I caught his eye."

"Speak up, Reed, we cannot hear you. What are you saying?" demanded Sir Reginald.

"Son-in-law, what I said last night might, with small charity, be charged to the account of my excitement, my trouble, my dismay. I take back all I said. I ask your pardon. For God's sake, son-in-law, let it lie, let it lie!"

"It is too late now. You should have thought better of the matter before you put your tongue to so foul a charge. With your permission, gentlemen, I should like to make a statement in reference to my whereabouts yesterday."

"As you like, Mr. Tuer. Though really I hardly think there is any necessity for it. The idea seems, I must say, slightly preposterous," said Sir Reginald Burgundy, annotating his remarks with weighty shakes of his large, white-crowned, judicial-looking head, which rendered the quality of the enclosed brain quite a secondary consideration.

His words seemed to hit the sentiment of the meeting, with one exception. This was Mr. Julius Baron, the senior partner of the bank. Mr. Julius Baron had a lordly name, and something of lordhood in his nature. He was as white-haired, as corpulent, as florid as Sir Reginald himself. His head-piece was not so imposing, but its contents were finer, his face more intellectual, while his heart was as large as his waistcoat. Sir Reginald's heart might have been circled by his signet-ring.

Said Mr. Julius Baron, in a soft, mellow voice, while he seemed to be quietly beating musical time with the gold eyeglasses in his right hand, "I think, Sir Reginald, it might be well to hear Mr. Tuer's statement. As I understand, Mr. Reed has withdrawn and apologized for any words reflecting on Mr. Tuer. But I fear

that we shall discover that there is more in this affair than meets the eye or lies on the surface. Not a stone should be left unturned. And, looking to all the circumstances, I think it is only fair to Mr. Tuer that he should be allowed to make any statement he desires."

Tuer listened to this with eyebrows a little raised, and he kept his glance steadily fixed on the speaker.

CHAPTER XII.

OF THE POWER OF CIRCUMSTANCES.

"CERTAINLY, Mr. Baron, certainly. I fully agree with you that there is more in this case than catches the ordinary eye. Mr. Tuer, you may proceed with your statement," observed Sir Reginald, in a tone that implied his sorrow that his friend Baron, so intelligent a man generally speaking, should allow himself to waste precious time in following what was obviously a false track.

Said Tuer, standing in an easy attitude and speaking in a conversational tone, "I wish, gentlemen, to account for my whereabouts yesterday afternoon and evening. Luckily, I am able to do this; for I may remark that, ordinarily, any five days out of six I should not be able to bring evidence in support of my statement. Put it to yourselves, gentlemen, and you will see that not every day of the week could you find corroborative evidence of your whereabouts at a given hour of the day."

"Hear, hear!" cried Sir Reginald, leaning back in his chair, with his eyes closed.

Continued Tuer, "Yesterday afternoon I left home at ten minutes to one, and went straight to the shop of Messrs. Jakes & Petto on personal business. There I found Mr. Petto, junior, and stayed there in conversation with him about half an hour. From there I went in an opposite direction to Heron's Wood, making for Dunrigg. About a mile beyond the 'Pack Horse,' I overtook police sergeant Longmire of the county force; we walked together some distance, half a mile or so, and then we parted, he going towards Nabsmere, while I kept on towards Dunrigg."

"What time was it when you parted, Mr. Tuer?" inquired Sir Reginald.

"I should think about 2.15."

"Thank you much," said Sir Reginald, making a careful note.

"My destination," continued Tuer, "was Hazelslack Pond. My object, carp."

"Not a criminal pursuit, at any rate," interjected the baronet, with a deep laugh, in which the town-clerk joined without loss of time.

Said Tuer, with a smile, "I hope not, for I am addicted to it. Well, gentlemen, arrived at the pond, I happened to look at my watch. It marked two minutes past three. Just then the clock in the tower of the town-hall struck three, and I debated in my mind whether my watch was fast or the clock was slow."

"And what conclusion did you reach, sir?" inquired Sir Reginald, waggishly.

"I decided in favor of my watch. I always do, on principle," answered Tuer, falling pleasantly in with the baronet's mood.

A wave of laughter passed over the meeting, only Mr. Julius Baron was not touched by it, nor David Reed. The latter was still standing, pale and weak, behind a chair on which he seemed to lean for support. Mr. Julius Baron seemed just now to notice the old man's exhaustion, and called out, "Ho, Reed! sit down, man, and rest yourself. You look tired."

"Thank you, sir," said David Reed, humbly, seating himself.

Tuer continued, "Fifteen minutes later, soon after I had caught my first fish, a shepherd came down over the fell, and we chatted together for some time. His name is Miles Birkett, and he is in the employ of Mr. Isaac Capstick, of Spindle Knott Farm."

"Ah yes, Capstick is one of my tenants. A very good and worthy man is Isaac Capstick," observed Sir Reginald, with delightful irrelevance.

Said Tuer, "I should think it was about half-past three when the shepherd left me and dropped down the mountain. My statement is, gentlemen, that I remained at Hazelslack Pond and fished until half-past six. I have no direct evidence in corroboration, other than the number of fish I caught. I caught twelve carp; one I threw back into the pond, and the eleven I brought home. And I submit that the catch was a good one in the time."

"Quite so, quite so, Mr. Tuer," assented Sir Reginald, with a

gravity that was, perhaps, inspired by his complete ignorance of the piscatory art.

And now Philip Tuer's manner underwent a change. He became very serious and impressive in tone and attitude.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I must ask you now for your closest attention. Mr. Reed has told you, I believe, that the assault was committed upon him within a minute or two minutes of twenty-eight minutes past seven. Now, I fished till half-past six. To arrange my tackle and look after my catch would, I suppose, take me perhaps ten minutes. Then I started for home, happy enough in my mind, but tired in body. It was easy dropping downhill, however, and so I covered about three miles and a half in sixty-five minutes. That brings us to a quarter to eight, almost the very time of the robbery. Where was I at that time? I will tell you, gentlemen. At a quarter to eight I reached the 'Pack Horse,' and, feeling a bit spent, I turned in and had a glass of brandy-and-water. Gentlemen, from Heron's Wood to the 'Pack Horse' inn is over five miles. This had to be done, and the chloroform administered, and the false beard pulled off, and the dimple in the chin recognized, and the key found, and the bag opened, emptied, shut, and the key replaced—all in fifteen minutes. Gentlemen, without wings, or a broomstick, I submit that the feat was impossible."

"Impossible, Mr. Tuer, absolutely impossible," echoed Sir Reginald.

"As it happened, I stayed at the 'Pack Horse' longer than I intended. I left at half-past eight and came straight home. That is all I have to say, gentlemen." And Tuer sat down.

Said Mr. Julius Baron, "Since you have thought it necessary and right to make the interesting statement we have just heard, I am sure, Mr. Tuer, that you would wish it to be treated seriously, and subjected to the ordinary tests of evidence?"

"Certainly," answered Tuer.

"Then, may I ask, how do you propose to establish the accuracy of your statement that you were at the 'Pack Horse' at 7.45 last evening?"

"I have witnesses to prove it."

"Are they at hand?"

"They are."

"Will you call them, please?"

"With pleasure," said Tuer, jumping to his feet, and leaving the room.

In a little while he returned, accompanied by the landlady of the "Pack Horse." On being questioned, she confessed that she did not really know what time it was when Tuer reached the "Pack Horse" the previous evening, but it must have been somewhere about eight. All she had to guide her was that her ten months' old baby awoke just then, and began to cry for its milk. She heard it begin to pule as she was taking in the gentleman's brandy. This was a poser for the meeting, and the men looked at each other wistfully. There was no doubt that the puling of the infant had evidential value, but in what direction it lay was more than they could discover on the spur of the moment. But at length the mayor, falling back upon his varied experience as the father of a large family, struck an idea that brought light, like a match in a dark room.

"Do you feed your baby at regular hours?" he asked.

"Yes, I do," answered the landlady, tartly, bristling with suspicion in a moment.

"And he wakes regularly, I suppose, for his food?"

"'Tisn't a he at all. It's a she," quoth the mother, indignantly.

"Oh—I beg the baby's pardon, I am sure. Does she wake at regular hours?"

"Bless your heart, sir, she's better nor any clock! She begins at five o'clock every morning, and keeps going, on and off, till eight at night."

"Now we have it, I think. She wakes regularly at eight o'clock every night, does she?"

"Yes, sir, she do, five nights out o' six, only ten minutes to eight's her time by rights."

That was all they got out of the landlady. If baby was prompt, Tuer was there at ten minutes to eight.

After the landlady came Miles Birkett, shepherd, wearing a clean smock-frock and an idiotic grin of nervousness. He testified to being at the "Pack Horse" on the previous evening when Tuer came in. He gave the time of Tuer's arrival as being a quarter or ten minutes to eight. Asked how he fixed the time, he scratched his head for some moments, and then hoisted out of his fob a big silver watch with a face like a full moon.

"By this here, gemmen," he said, grinning. He had looked

at it, he explained, some five or ten minutes before the gentleman entered, when it showed close on eight, and it was twenty minutes fast, if it was a minute.

"Is it fast now?" inquired Mr. Julius Baron.

"Dunno, sir," answered the shepherd.

After no little difficulty, the shepherd managed to detach his watch from the steel chain which might have been riveted to his ribs, from the tone in which its owner deprecated the idea of handing it round, watch and all. Upon examination and comparison with other watches, no two of which marked the same time of day, it was agreed that the shepherd's turnip was eighteen minutes and forty seconds too fast. Exit Miles Birkett, jubilant.

A bucolic liar? Not a bit of it. That between looking at his watch and the coming of Tuer he had slept for a good half-hour, was a little fact of which he was a good deal more than half unconscious. He knew he had fallen asleep, but it was only a petty forty-winks' affair, for had not Tuer himself said, when leaving at half-past eight, that he had been there forty-five minutes? Something did, indeed, whisper to him that his intellects were hazy at the time; but this he rated as a suggestion of that ever-vigilant, over-accurate, and censorious principle of evil in a man, that delighted in insinuating what he could not prove. He treated it, accordingly, with the fine contempt which he thought was due the inward traitor that was always on the lookout to frame an accusation against every honest creature that harbored it. Fundamentally, this may be called the popular view of the nature of conscience. In the geology of human beliefs it is the Plutonic rock, first made, and found everywhere.

Sergeant Longmire was next admitted, but his testimony, bearing simply on the time of Tuer's departure from the inn, was considered of secondary value.

When he had retired, Sir Reginald Burgundy said, "Well, Mr. Tuer, I must congratulate you. I think your case is clear enough. Do you not think so, Mr. Baron?"

"Quite so. But there was really no charge against the gentleman. By-the-bye, Mr. Tuer, were you aware of the existing arrangement respecting Lady Eden's jewels?"

"Not at all," answered Tuer.

"Did you know that the jewels were deposited from time to time with us?"

"I did not."

"Did you know that David Reed ever carried them, or had anything to do with them?"

"I did not."

"You would swear that?"

"Certainly," replied Tuer, coldly, while his face flushed with anger.

"Did your wife know?"

"She is of age. Ask her."

So Janet was brought in, pale, but too high-strung to be nervous in the ordinary sense. Every man's sympathy was hers just then. Yes, she admitted she knew all about the jewels; her father had told her about them some few years back, indeed before she was married. At this act of indiscretion Mr. Julius Baron wrinkled his brows and shot a momentary glance of reproach at David Reed.

"Excepting your father, Mrs. Tuer, have you ever spoken on the subject to any one?"

"Never," answered Janet, with emphasis.

"Not a syllable?"

"Not a syllable."

"Not even to your husband?"

"Not even to my husband."

"Why not?"

"Because father told me I was not to. I understood from him that secrecy was absolutely necessary."

"Quite so. Thank you, Mrs. Tuer, and forgive me for having troubled you, please. Good-morning," said Mr. Julius Baron, rising from his chair, and giving her a smile of encouragement and a low bow.

Sir Reginald shuffled in his seat uneasily, blew his nose vigorously, but did not rise. The other men rose; but the mayor, when about six inches from his seat, perceiving that Sir Reginald was not rising, hastily dropped a lead-pencil, and as hastily stooped to pick it up. By which little act he dexterously cut short his courtesy in mid-flight, and so preserved his dignity. This little bit of comedy—with roots deep down and intertwined with those of strongest tragedy—being over and done with, Sir Reginald thought it was time for the hunt, so to speak, to return to that hot scent from which they had been diverted by Tuer's in-

tervention, and, yet further, by Mr. Julius Baron's singular lack of judicial insight.

"Now, Reed," he said, "if you will be good enough to give me your attention, after this little diversion, we will return to the main subject."

"Yes, sir," responded David Reed, rising to his feet and taking his stand behind his chair. In which position he looked much as he felt, like a prisoner in the dock.

"I understand you to say that never but once before did you carry the key out of the bank or in your pocket?"

"That is true, sir."

"You will admit, I think, that the fact of the robbery taking place at the very time, on the very occasion, when you happened to have the key on you, constitutes a coincidence as singular as it was unlucky?"

"It does, sir. My carelessness is properly punished."

"In the persons of your employers and Lady Eden, it is. I also understand you to say that, having rendered you insensible with chloroform, this mysterious robber, instead of snatching your small bag and making off with it at all speed, proceeded to act in this remarkable manner: firstly, he searched your pockets until he found the key, which ought not to have been on your person; secondly, he unlocked the bag and abstracted its contents; thirdly, he locked the bag again; and, fourthly, returned the key to your pocket. All this time you were liable to recover your senses and recognize him, and he was liable to be interrupted by some one coming along the road. He must have been an extraordinarily cool, methodical rogue, quite polite, and almost humorous, eh?"

There was an open irony in the baronet's tone and manner that bit into David Reed's spirit like a vitrioline acid. He said not a word, but looked Sir Reginald Burgundy steadily and honestly in the face, with eyes full of pain.

"In a word, Reed, do you not think that the story you tell is so improbable, so preposterous, that any jury in the county would refuse to believe it?"

Stern was now Sir Reginald's voice, dark his brow, minatory his forefinger, and terrific the judicial nodding of his head.

Answered David Reed, while the words, "*Respect to your great place! And let the devil be sometime honor'd for his burning*"

throne," uncoiled themselves through his brain like a peal of thunder. "Yes, sir, I am much afraid that my story sounds improbable. But it is true. And truth is truth to th' end of reckoning."

"Amen, sir," quoth Sir Reginald, severely.

Then, to the surprise of every one, he suddenly inquired, "Do you ever use chloroform for any purpose yourself, Mr. David Reed?"

"No, sir."

"You have no use for it whatever?"

"None whatever, sir."

"Will some one kindly step outside the door and call in Constable Rawsthorn?"

To this request the chief constable responded with alacrity, and in a few moments Constable Rawsthorn entered the room. He saluted and stood against the closed door, stiff and upright, with no other sign of life than the strange blinking of his eyelids, which in itself seemed marvellous, as coming from a cunning image of a living man. Exported into Central Africa, properly coached respecting British interests, and set up as a divine image in a great popular temple, Constable Rawsthorn might have done great things, have eclipsed the Oracle of Delphi, and never have been found out. He would have lived and grown famous as a talking idol, and not until he had died would any one have discovered his secret, that he had once lived.

Said Sir Reginald, "Constable Rawsthorn, were you in the dingle in Heron's Wood this morning?"

"I was, sir, with the inspector and another constable."

"You found a bottle?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where?"

"In the wood, about fifty yards from the scene of the outrage, under a holly-bush."

"Have you the bottle with you?"

"Yes, sir; here it is."

He pulled out of his back pocket a glass bottle, bearing a label and containing a fluid about an inch deep. This was handed to Sir Reginald, corked.

"Was it corked when you found it, constable?"

"Yes, sir."

Adjusting his glasses, and holding the bottle for the light to fall upon it, the baronet said, "This, gentlemen, is written on the label—*Chloroform. Mr David Reed. To be called for.* And this is printed—*John Gretrex, Pharmaceutical Chemist, High Street, Scarwick.* Now, David Reed, take the bottle in your hand, and tell me, have you ever seen this bottle before?"

The bottle was handed to David Reed. He looked at it almost wildly, but would not touch it.

"That proves it, that proves it," he muttered to himself.

"What does he say?" asked Sir Reginald, glancing at the constable, who was standing near to Reed.

"Something about proving it, sir, I think."

"God help me! I think I must be losing my wits altogether. Sir Reginald, the bottle's mine. But I had clean forgotten all about it. And how it came there, in Heron's Wood, the rogue that robbed me knows—I don't. May I try to explain it to you, gentlemen?" said David Reed, glancing piteously round the room.

A thrill, a brief hot thrill of sympathetic pity ran through Mr. Julius Baron.

"Yes, Reed, yes; for God's sake explain it! Oh, this is terrible!" he exclaimed, in a husky voice.

"It must be a couple of months ago, or more," said David Reed, "when I was in Scarwick. There came on me suddenly a great and fierce pain in the stomach. I had had it once before. In the interval I had read somewhere that camphor dissolved in chloroform and applied externally was a good remedy for such pain. I happened to be near a chemist's shop, and I went in and ordered some chloroform, and left word I would call for it later, when my business was done. I called and got it, and brought it home, and put it away in a little squinch cupboard, and have not seen it from that day to this. When you asked me about using chloroform, Sir Reginald, I had no memory of it at all. My child will tell you that of late my memory has been anything but good."

"Is that all you have to tell us?"

"All I can think of now, Sir Reginald."

"Did you buy any camphor?"

"No, sir."

"Why not?"

"I think I thought I could get it as well in Fellby."

"But that would be equally true of the chloroform, I take it."

"Yes, sir; but I was actually in pain when I ordered it, but when I called for it the pain had gone."

"Did you purchase any camphor in Fellby?"

"No, sir. The pain did not return, has not returned since, and I forgot all about it."

"Yet had it returned, it would have taken some time for the camphor to dissolve—some hours?"

"Yes, sir, that is true."

"Did your daughter know of your purchase?"

"No."

"Did she know of your pain?"

"No. I did not want to trouble her. It would have made her anxious."

"Now, David Reed, can you offer no suggestion as to how this bottle of chloroform was conveyed from your squinch cupboard to the holly-bush in Heron's Wood?"

Involuntarily David Reed cast a quick glance towards Philip Tuer, who met it without a wink.

"No, no; I cannot," he said, and his head fell.

"If I were to suggest that you carried it there yourself, should I be far wrong?"

"Yes, sir; you would suggest a lie!" cried David Reed, in a burst of anger that leaped forth like a flame.

The flush that dyed the face of Sir Reginald Burgundy was flame answering to flame.

He turned to the two bankers, and said: "If I were in your position, gentlemen, I should require no further evidence. I should know my duty to myself, to Lady Eden, to the public at large, and I should do it, however painful it might be."

A dead silence ensued. The sense of an impending catastrophe fell upon every one. The first to speak was the junior bank partner. He was a tall, thin man, with a fine Roman nose and eyes like a hawk.

"You advise his arrest?"

Sir Reginald bowed his head solemnly, in token of assent.

"My judgment coheres with yours, Sir Reginald. David Reed, I charge you with—"

"Stop, stop!" interrupted Mr. Julius Baron, with energy. "I will not, I cannot, consent to it. For close on thirty years he has

served us diligently and faithfully. Thirty years of honest service counts for something—yes, counts for everything.”

Then, suddenly addressing David Reed, “Why, man alive, if this thing had happened twenty years ago, I might have thought it possible you were a rogue. But I have trusted you out and out, and you have never failed yet. Yet here you stand to-day, ringed in with a lot of circumstances that point at you like devils and cry you guilty. Why—why, I would have trusted you with my—my purse; humbug! with my honor, David Reed! Why—why—there, d—— it! I won’t believe it, David Reed! Go home, go home, and stay there till I send for you. Oh, this is terrible—terrible!”

And Mr. Julius Baron rose and went to the window, where he ran his hands surreptitiously across his eyes; and David Reed went forth tottering, with bowed head and a broken heart.

CHAPTER XIII.

OF THE POWER OF STEEL.

“Is he asleep?”

“Yes, he is sleeping heavily. The doctor says that when he awakes the fever will probably have left him, and he will be rational again. Still, he says his life hangs on a thread, he is so weak.”

“Oh, there’s not much doubt but what he will pull through. Some day, perhaps, he will acknowledge the wrong he has done me.”

“Yes, yes; and then—I know him better than you do, Philip—then he will never forgive himself. Yes, he must live. Oh, if he died now, thinking what he does of you, my husband, I should never get over it!”

“For myself, Janet, I do not care a brass farthing what he thinks of me. But I was determined to defend myself publicly, and so his gentle suspicion concerning me is now public property. The wretched curs would like to bark at me openly, but they dare not. I have to thank him for branding me a thief in the eyes of the crowd.”

"Spare him, Philip, dear, as you love me. I cannot defend him."

"When he came home from that meeting, three weeks ago, and I asked him if he still thought me guilty, what said he? Referring to my witnesses, he said: 'If they swore truly, son-in-law, you ought to be innocent; but you are not, and I believe them not. With my own eyes I saw you, and you know it.' Gad! if he had only been a younger man, I would have knocked him down!"

"But think what he has suffered, dear, and at his time of life. He is ruined, Philip, utterly ruined. If the Countess herself had not interceded for him, and nobly promised not to hold the bank responsible for the loss of her jewels, they would have had him arrested on suspicion of stealing them himself."

"And little wonder, too, for the matter of that. Jove! I think any jury would convict on the evidence."

"Have I lived to hear you say that of him, Philip?"

"Say what? I did not say, I do not say, he is guilty. For myself, strongly as the evidence points in the other direction, I believe him to be innocent. But his position being what it is, he should be the last man lightly to accuse another, son-in-law or no son-in-law."

"That is true, dear. It was cruel of him, it was wicked, it was mean. I dare not think about it, Philip; it makes my blood sometimes run cold, and sometimes boil. No, it was not father: father was honor itself. He was not himself, I am sure; he was out of his mind. Philip, I believe he was—mad. Yes, I do. And sometimes, do you know, I have thought that perhaps he really did it himself—did it in a fit of madness. Perhaps, when he comes to himself, he may remember it all like a dream, and the jewels may be recovered, and his honor, his shattered honor, be repieced."

"I am afraid, Janet, that the cracks would show to the end of the chapter. Honor once blown upon is never afterwards quite fresh. Still, your theory is ingenious, and has the merit of being probable. I do not think it would be very difficult to prove him mad. At any rate, I would undertake to do the proving, if he would turn up the jewels."

"Do you mean it really?"

"Why, certainly. What other proof would be needed? He

would say, 'Gentlemen, here are the baubles.' I should say, 'Gentlemen, behold a madman.' All the gentlemen would say, in their gentle heart of hearts, 'There is no doubt of it, for idiocy is a form of madness.' The idea is as pretty as it is simple, wife. The whole thing would wind up with a public love-feast in the town-hall. If only he will get well, and remember that he has been mad, and just fork out the missing treasure!"

"The disgrace, husband—think of that! If I remained here long I think it would kill me."

"You are right, wife. It would be impossible for me, at any rate, to remain in Fellby."

"I could not ask you to—I could not wish you to. But he is not yet out of danger, you know. I must wait until he has got better, and then—oh, it will be hard to leave him! He is my father, and I love him so dearly!" She sobbed. "But you are my husband, and—" She looked up into his face bravely and tenderly. "You are my own dear husband, and you have been cruelly wronged; and whither thou goest I will go—to the end of the world, if need be."

He took her in his arms and kissed her.

"Spoken like a good, true wife. We will leave England, and go to the States. And there we will try and forget it all."

"And forgive?"

"I am in the wrong atmosphere at present, Janet, to breathe forgiveness. Give me time, and a change of scenery, and then, who knows? Are you going to sit up with him again? You will make yourself ill, if you do not mind."

"Do not fret about me, dear; I shall lie down on the sofa in his room, and try and get a little sleep. The doctor thinks he will not awake for some hours. Good-night, love." Exit Janet.

Philip Tuer drew his chair near to the table, arranged the lamp, sat down, opened a book, read a little, reflected a while, nodded his head, and slept the sleep of the just. The soporific most generally in use among great and small, literate and illiterate, is literature, good, bad, and indifferent. And looked at fairly and squarely, with no vain squint of authorship, this is perhaps the greatest merit to which literature, in the wide and the narrow sense of the term, can lay claim. The page, the sheet, the column has never yet been printed, published, and read over which no one has fallen asleep. But he who sleeps dines, and after dinner the wildest

savage becomes almost tame; so that the "humanizing influence of literature" is, after all, something more than a mere phrase. Only, those who suck in sleep from the printed page should in law be guilty of a misdemeanor by using the same book twice; nor should they be allowed to obtain their soporifics through the medium of the circulating library, but should be by law compelled to purchase them from the bookseller, at the published price, and without discount. The result in any case would be very remarkable. So many new books would be sold that writers would wax proud, and go about the city in gilded chariots drawn by white mules. Or, what is more probable, the art and trade of book-making would quickly become as extinct as the practice of illuminating missals; and all writers would be banished into foreign parts as common and notorious enemies of the State. Seeing how great are the risks it is better, perhaps, after all, that the old civilized system should continue; that men and women should read and sleep and dream to the end of the chapter, inasmuch as the chapter at the longest is but short.

Tuer slept. And as he slept the door of the little sitting-room opened slowly and noiselessly, and David Reed came in on tiptoe. Dressed in his night-gown, with bare feet, and face pale and emaciated, the fever-fire seemed yet alight in his eyes. He came stealthily and stood for some moments gazing at Tuer, and as he gazed his face became distorted with passion. His eyes wandered wildly round the room, and soon caught sight of a large bread-knife that lay on the sideboard. He crossed the room and seized it. He felt the blade with his thumb, then his eyes blazed with fearful joy, and he waved the knife above his head in delirious exultation. Suddenly he hid the knife in his night-dress, and looked sharply round as though some one had spoken to him behind his back. He beckoned with his finger, and began speaking to an imaginary person in a soft whisper.

"And why not?" said he. "He has stolen my good name from me—my only treasure. He has covered me with infamy. Had he killed me, it would have been less cruel. To die is nothing, but to live dishonored—ah, that indeed is woe! It would be a kindness to kill him first, and then myself. Therefore—being a cruelty—I will let him live. Yes, villain, live, live, live; aye, live forever, villain! Yet I will have a word with him."

He stepped up to the sleeping man, took him gently by the

collar, held the knife as if about to strike, and spoke in a loud voice, "Son-in-law, wake up. The moon is in the skies."

Tuer woke with a great start, and tried to rise, but found himself held firmly down.

"Good God!" he exclaimed, "where am I? What is it? You, eh? Loose me, you scoundrel!"

"Ha, ha!" laughed David Reed, flourishing his knife in a wild manner. "Son-in-law, it's my turn now. Steel will pay all the debts incurred by chloroform. Quiet, son-in-law, quiet, or by the powers above, I'll drive it to your heart! Where have you hidden 'em, eh?"

Gasped Tuer, "Hidden what? the jewels? It was a joke, as you said, it was only a joke. Let me go, and I will fetch them, I swear!"

"Then you did steal them?" hissed David Reed.

"Yes, yes; of course I did; you know I did. Let me go. Put down that knife, like a good man."

"You villain, you double-dyed scoundrel! And you have stood by and seen me, an old man, ruined, broken, cast out like a leper, and yet—"

He made as if to strike.

"Help! murder! mur—!" cried Tuer, in mortal terror.

With a scream, Janet rushed into the room, and snatched the knife from her father's hand.

Then Tuer sprang to his feet, and throwing David Reed from him, exclaimed, "You miserable old wretch, you shall suffer for this to your dying day!"

"Janet, child," said David Reed, "I was right. He did it. He said he did it. He said he would turn them up; but he is a liar as well as a thief, and he won't, you'll see. Philip Tuer, may the Almighty deny sleep to your brain, and forbid death to come nigh you! Amen. Janet, it is dark—where are—Jan—" Then he fell senseless to the floor.

Part II.

CHAPTER XIV.

OF A LADY OF FANCY.

WISDOM and sanity are perhaps convertible terms, seeing that thoroughly sane people do not seem to be more plentiful than thoroughly wise. A little knowledge may be a dangerous thing, but not so a little sanity. This is always desirable, for comfort's sake, in a world that is not much more than half mad. For though the thoroughly mad may find himself in a larger company than the thoroughly wise, he will still be a member of the minority—a dreadful thing to be, in a world devoted to the doctrine of eternal night as discovered in the number of noses.

Extremes are dangerous. Be mad in moderation. Let not the turbulent waves of madness beat wildly upon the dark, rocky headland of thy nature. Rather let the shallow tide of insanity creep softly, with its own sad music, over the broad shore-sands of thy nature, and all will be well. The world, with his wife and children, will not flee away affrighted, but will come and line thy margents with bathing-machines, and ask no questions concerning changed channels and treacherous quicksands.

In our asylums there are I know not how many hundred Queens of England. Out of our asylums there are I know not how many thousand peers that cannot obtain a recognition of their titles, how many thousand heirs whose estates are all in Chancery. Herein we see the beauty of moderation in madness. Claim the crown, and you will get a keeper. Claim a peerage, or an estate worth a million, and you are treated with consideration, and the public will find you money to play the game properly.

Priscilla Oldcastle, when in the flesh, was one of those who

recognized the fitness of moderation in madness; which saying will be accepted as true by many yet alive who knew her. Some of them, indeed, go so far as to exalt her into a model, and to quote her as an example. They say, and their saying cannot be denied, that not only was her madness characterized by method and moderation, but that eventually it resulted not in smoke, or in a lost and ruinous lawsuit, but in solid money and real acres. This is true. True also is it that in this world there are no such things as free gifts. Everything has its price, is bought and paid for. And though Priscilla Oldcastle did get both money and acres, it is by no means clear that she bought them in a cheap market.

Descended from an ancient and impoverished stock, she was a claimant born, not made. There never was a time when she did not feel quite sure that somewhere or other there was an estate, if not a title, that would be hers, if everybody had what naturally, morally, legally, and properly belonged to them. She had childish memories of halting in road or lane at the sound of carriage-wheels or horse's hoofs, expecting some one to appear who would salute her as the Countess of So-and-so, or the heiress of some vast property. Thus, though bred in a cottage, she lived her truest life in a palace. And though she washed the dishes, and scrubbed the floors, and fed the pigs and poultry every day and well, she was never other or less than the fine lady of luxury, refinement, and ease.

Day-dreams touched with magic splendor are common enough, especially among those to whom this dear brown old earth is a brave new world. But the dreams are known to be dreams; all too soon they fade away, and with them the magician's power to evoke them. Priscilla Oldcastle, however, to her dying day never knew, in any common-sense fashion, the difference between reality and illusion. For her, reality was illusion, and illusion was the only reality.

Two things resulted from this strange domination of fancy. Poverty is not so hard to bear, is not so grinding, as the sense of poverty. Our worst woes are mental, not physical. It is not what we lack that constitutes our poverty, but what we desire to have and have not. The slow-tongued man desiring keenly the gift of fiery eloquence, though a millionaire, he lives and dies with a sense of poverty; he is less rich than his slow-tongued brethren who have no desire for the perilous gift.

Priscilla Oldcastle had no sense of poverty. On the contrary, she had a sense of wealth that was superior to all the hard realities of her daily life. This feeling of affluence was not fluctuating or evanescent; it was full-blown, unwavering, and beyond doubt. It filled the sails of her buoyant nature like a fresh breeze, carrying her over the sea of life like a beautiful racing-yacht. It did not matter a fig that she could not come at her wealth, that she could not realize it, that she did not even know where it lay. The main point—indeed, the only point worth consideration—was the fact that she had wealth. The time would come when she and it would stand, so to speak, face to face and hand in hand. Meanwhile she made Silas Oldcastle a loving wife, a pretty good house-keeper, and did not run much above her ankles in the slimy waters of debt. Closely looked at, this last item speaks volumes. It is a bit of gold, pure and simple.

In the next place, side by side with her sense of wealth went a sense of ladyhood. This, likewise, was all-pervading and very precious. It kept her up when everything else tended to force her down.

Since the foundation of the world—the social world at least—it has been said that poverty is honorable and riches a snare. Every Sunday the same statement in various forms is made in hundreds of pulpits. Yet no one seeks the honor, while most would like to be caught in the snare. Under certain special conditions, poverty may be honorable. As a general fact, it has nothing of the honorable to commend it, and it has everything of the horrible to condemn it. And since the beginning of time poverty was never more bitter, more degrading, more terrible than in the current year of God's grace, and in this blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England. Were the poor sweet-tongued, gentle-mannered, with clean bodies, refined tastes, generous, familiar with ideas, loving noble ideals, and acting freely on the free impulse of a large soul—then would poverty cease to be a crime and become a distinction. There are those who dream of such a world, of such a happy breed of poor men. But they are dreamers. Poverty bends the back, soils the body, deforms the hands, corrupts the speech, banishes ideas, strangles ideals, and distorts the image of God into the grim and terrible image of a beast. This it does not violently or with noise, but silently, ceaselessly, with the beautiful rhythm and deadly cer-

tainty of natural law. It is all one with the babbling of a brook and the growth of a violet.

Priscilla Oldcastle set at defiance this exquisite law of destruction. Her hands, indeed, grew red and coarse, for as a working farmer's wife she had plenty of hard work to do; but there the law of destruction stopped. She fought it with the great fact of her essential ladyhood, and she won. Her personal habits she kept religiously nice. The monkey-like imitativeness of mankind is seen in nothing more clearly than in the use of words and tones of the voice. In these most people sink or rise to the level of their surroundings. But our lady did nothing of the kind; she was not so indolent, so slovenly, so vulgar. She attached great importance to pronunciation, modulation, and vocabulary. These always stamped her a gentlewoman.

To make both ends meet was always a struggle, and they had no sooner met than they flew apart again: as a pious opinion, it is permissible to doubt that both ends were ever designed to meet in this world of partings. Just here did Priscilla Oldcastle feel the touch, like a searing-iron, of the exquisite law of destruction, impelling her towards sordidity masked as prudence, economy, aye, even necessity. The head and front of poverty is meanness. Therefore our lady, stinting herself in butter, tea, meat, eggs, flannels, stuffs for gowns, and many other things not now set forth, did keep ever replenished a small fund devoted to the multifarious purposes of charity. She denied herself that she might give. This, not from pietism or philanthropy. It was her method of fighting the leprosy of meanness.

Her library was wofully meagre. Gibbon's "Rome" in four volumes, Hume and Smollett in three volumes, Shakespeare in two, Johnson's Dictionary in two folios, Montaigne in one, Wordsworth in one, and a huge Family Bible—these were all worth naming. This was the quarry in which her mind delved. Hither came she for treasure. All she sought she found. She read and reread them, knew them half by heart, loved them, so that she could not have loved them more had they been pretty new bonnets or dainty new gowns. So she nourished her mind with great thoughts, with facts, images, and ideals. She saved her soul from contraction, kept her sympathies flying east, west, north, and south, while her brain was made fertile by the flowing through it of a noble river of ideas. In this way she sustained her sense of ladyhood.

Between the exterior and interior life of most people there is probably so much of resemblance and kinship as lies in the monotonous, the commonplace, the uninteresting. Outwardly our lady of fancy led anything but a brilliant and fascinating existence, but there never was a period when her inward life lacked interest, and was less than a romance.

At this time, the date of our narrative, the romance was more than fifty years old. To that extent the world must remain, we fear, ever the poorer. She was a medium-sized woman, with a good figure, plump enough to suggest good-temper and lack of care. Her hair was quite white, her complexion was good, and her face was a living picture of womanly sweetness and spiritual serenity. She had been a beauty in her young days, and had mellowed, silvered, and chastened into the image of a saint. To look at her was to love her. Her energy was mental, not physical, and she had a wondrous stock of it, of which she showed but little trace to the casual observer.

Her eyes were a strange mixture of gray and brown, and held a curious look of distance in them. Dreamy, mystical, prophetic eyes they were: Napoleon had the like, and Swedenborg. The odd thing about it was, that underneath this outward expression—at the back, and seen, as it were, through a semi-transparent mask—there glowed the light unmistakable of direct unveiled intelligence. It was sanity peering through the thin glazed membrane of madness. And her eyes told the whole tale.

A dear devout soul was Priscilla Oldcastle, unruffled by the softest breeze of doubt. Yet embedded in the very heart of her creed, like a fly in amber, was a fatalism as sublime as a Turk's. Silas, her husband, as a farmer struggled bravely for years with the weather and the markets and the creditors. They were too much for him, and he went down with a crash. His wife sighed, kissed him as though she found him extra sweet as a bankrupt, and turned with a proud smile to investigate the documents bearing upon her latest claim.

Silas turned timber-merchant; why, he did not know, except that he had to turn something. Priscilla asked him why he did not turn banker, and he said he did not know, unless it was because he had no money. He failed a second time. Now, Silas Oldcastle was an honest man, and hence, perhaps, his want of success. This second failure scarred his face with some deep lines,

and turned his black hair almost white. As for Priscilla, she sat up three nights running, gathering up the scattered links of a genealogical chain that was going to bind in her keeping a fortune worth having.

Meanwhile the pot had to be kept boiling; there was the pot, indeed, but no fire to boil it, and nothing to put in it when it boiled. An ordinary soul would have been touched with dismay, not to say despair. Silas himself was so touched; so was Margaret, their only child, a girl of sixteen, a replica of her mother at the same age, only quite sane. Priscilla alone was undismayed. Her fatalism was superb and impregnable. Something would turn up, she was sure. She was in a corner, it was true, but then the world was full of corners, and somebody was in all of them. Besides, what mattered it, so long as she had elbow-room for her soul? In a common-sense world this would have been as fatal as ridiculous. In the actual world the event proved that our lady of fancy stood upon her native heath. Something did turn up. It was nothing less than the maiden sister of Silas.

This lady, named Rebecca, suddenly appeared, armed with the proposition that she should come and live with them. This, as she was a person of some means, meant a leg of mutton in the pot, and a good fire to boil it. So they left Abbeystead and took a pretty little house, with a few acres of orchard, garden, and grass land attached, within a mile of the city of Abbeystead, and within sight of the great square tower of the cathedral, built of Roman bricks. Here they had dwelt three years, and Rebecca Oldcastle played Providence to their necessity.

During that time certain things came to pass. The girl Margaret, for instance, budded and flowered into most sweet young womanhood. She was probably the loveliest young woman in the county. Thanks to Aunt Rebecca, she had also been well educated. She was now equipped with a perfect set of genteel ideas, and admirably disqualified to be the wife of any man that was at all likely to propose for her hand. For she was poor, and her social standing did not bristle with brilliant opportunities. She seemed destined, though a creature of light and beauty, to be swallowed up in the weltering murk of the eternal governess—figure most dismal, colorless, and tragic, the feminine counterpart of the eternal curate.

An event of some importance occurred when they made the

acquaintance of Mr. Digby Roy. This gentleman lived on the outskirts of Burnepost, a rural village about two-thirds of a mile from the Oldcastles. Margaret was a lover of the dear old cathedral, so famous, so plain, and yet so grand and beautiful, so chock-full of historic interest, from the ground on which it stood to the very bricks of which it was largely built. She preferred to worship there. Still, she often went with her mother and Aunt Rebecca to Burnepost, which was their parish church. Mr. Digby Roy had a good view of her profile as she sat in church. He thought it so exquisitely beautiful that he felt it his duty to make the acquaintance of the parents that were equal to such a bit of fine work. And this he did.

During this time a yet stranger thing, indeed, the strangest of all things, happened. Following on the second failure of Silas, Priscilla had unearthed a brand-new claim. This of itself was no novelty. She had laid claim to coal-fields, to lead-mines, to slate-quarries, to houses and lands, to woods and waters. It was curious what a lot of property had been in her family at one time or another. Some of her claims were utterly fantastic, but not all. Twice had she come within an ace of pulling off a prize. But the ace failed her, and she lost. Now, however, she had got hold of something that actually threatened to turn out to be the real thing. At last she had struck oil.

CHAPTER XV.

OF THE PEOPLE AT THE PINES.

THE residence of the Oldcastles was known as Pine Cottage, from a plantation of pines that sheltered the house from the north and east winds. It stood back from the road some fifty feet, and was approached through a garden in front, surrounded by a thick yew-hedge, and full of all kinds of old-fashioned pleasantnesses. The cottage stood on rising ground, was painted white all over, and had a beautifully thatched roof; there were three windows above and two below, between which was the door. Over the door was a porch of stone-work; in the porch were a

couple of garden-seats; in front of the porch were a gravel path the length of the cottage, and three stone steps going down to the garden. The wicket-gate at the end of the walk, giving on to the road, was crowned with a great arch of holly, over which trailed lilacs, and honeysuckles creamy and red.

The room to the right of the front door was the dining-room, while the parlor was to the left. The latter was a very quaintly furnished room, and though it was the best room down-stairs, it was devoted almost exclusively to the use of Priscilla Oldcastle. On Sundays, high-days, and holidays it was thrown open to the family, but at all other times, by common consent, it remained sacred to Priscilla. Here she sat and wove her plans, and elaborated her claims, and traced her pedigrees, and built her castles in Spain.

Here, accordingly, she was found one fine morning in May, dressed with more than her usual care. The light in her eyes was more mysterious than ever, yet her manner was curiously calm, while the sweetness of her countenance was seraphic. Indeed, she looked like a blessed saint whose spirit had been exalted, whose eyes had been purged, who had seen the vision beautiful, and was glad. A stranger, seeing her so, would have looked for a Bible, a book of devotions, a sacred picture, a holy image, even for a private altar and candles consecrate. And he would not have found them. In their place he would have discovered a mass of documents, legal and otherwise, such as copies of registers, wills, pedigrees, affidavits, letters, and old newspapers. They lay in her lap, about her feet, on a footstool at her right hand, and on a small table to the left of her low rocking-chair. This was her arsenal, these her weapons. She was like a warrior mailed from head to foot; and the look of inspiration in her eyes was the light of battle and conquest.

Her mind was in a tumult of excitement; hence her look of sweet serenity. She felt inclined to jump up and give a wild dance round and round the room; hence the motionless attitude she maintained, broken only by occasional movements of the head and hands, gentle, delicate, melodious with the subtile rhythm of graceful and measured movement. She could have broken out in full song—yea, have lifted up her voice and sent forth a great shout; hence her tones were low, and few were her words, and these beautifully enunciated, and dropped with the pretty languor of a fine lady making love to her divine poodle.

Presently she rose from her seat, gathering together the papers in her lap and holding them with her left hand against her breast, and pulled the crimson bell-cord by the fireplace. The summons was answered by the maid-of-all-work.

"Tell your master that I should like to see him, Jane," said Priscilla, with a smile that made the overworked maid esteem it a pleasure to wait hand and foot upon Mrs. Oldcastle.

Sinking back into her chair, and refilling her lap with her precious documents, she held one of them in her hand while she rocked slowly backward and forward.

"Who would have thought . . . not a child among them. . . . It was to be. . . . Twenty-five years ago . . . three lives in the way, and any one of them might . . . not a sixpence would I have given for my chance of ever . . . Let me see." Reads: "'Theophilus Twigg died April the tenth, eighteen hundred and two, childless and intestate.' He was the father—no, the son, only son and child of Jonathan Twigg. Died without making a will. . . . Foolish man. . . . I have made mine. . . . It evidently was not his will that killed him, though. . . . I wonder what killed his three wives . . . monster . . . three deliberate attempts to destroy the rights, the future but none the less real and actual rights, of an unborn babe, poor me . . . heartless, over-married wretch. . . . Any one attempt might have succeeded . . . just one little squealing infant, and my chances were . . . Ah! here comes Silas at last."

Just then a step was heard outside, and the next moment the door opened, and Silas Oldcastle stood in the door-way. He was a tall, stout, well-built man of about sixty, and though it was failure and bad luck that had turned his black hairs white, he looked remarkably hale and well-fed and almost handsome. His face was a good one, full of humanity and intelligence. He also had in him a strain of gentle blood, which showed itself in his bearing. Though only a common farmer in his best days, he did not look it. Seen in the saddle in a country lane, he had a touch of the squire about him, especially of the squire of sixty years ago, home-bred and home-staying.

He had no horse now to ride, but he still clung to cloth breeches and long, buttoned leggings. A soft felt hat was on the back of his head, leaving visible a broad, high forehead, which many a clever man might have envied. Silas Oldcastle was not

clever, not a bit of it; and better still, he had no desire to be; and best of all, he had not overmuch faith in your clever fellows. He had come in contact with them; he knew them; to them and bad seasons he owed all his misfortunes. So he believed, and perhaps he was right—just as right as the poor, clever wretches who lay all their want of success to the account of the fools and dullards who infest the land.

Though May was as yet but as a beautiful flower half opened, the sun was warmer than it oft is in July, so that the day was like a page of summer interpolated into the bright romance of the spring. Whereof the result was this: Silas had cast his coat, and now stood in the door-way arrayed in shirt-sleeves. His glance fell upon his wife, whose eyes were studiously bent upon the document in her hand; and as he beheld the pile of muni-ments about her, a ludicrous grimace of disgust distorted his features. These papers and these interviews were his horror. He was not without faith in the value of his wife's researches, but they bored him. Not for the best estate in England could he have brought himself to wade through the slippery bog of genealogical details, testamentary eccentricities, and legal subtleties, dexterities, profundities, and ambiguities amid which Priscilla floundered as securely and familiarly as a hippopotamus in a reedy marsh.

"Drat the things!" he said to himself; "if I had only known I would have tumbled into the woods for an hour or two."

He turned lightly on his heel and seemed about to make his escape, when he was suddenly brought round by the words, "Silas, where are you going?"

"Oh—yes—did you send for me, wife?" he inquired, thrusting both hands into his trousers-pockets, and staring at her with a look of amusement on his weather-bronzed face. As for Priscilla, she stared at him just as hard, but her expression was one of surprise mingled with reproach.

"Yes, husband; but I wished to see you in your—yes, your—integrity."

Silas opened his eyes wide at this, which sounded ominous.

"Integrity!" he repeated. "To be sure, I've been slee—thinking hard on the hay-rick in the orchard . . . there's a mighty lot of tramps, too, going about the country . . . one might have robbed me of my integrity, seeing that I kept no particular watch

over it . . . what use would it be to a thief, though? . . . My old jack-knife would serve him better, I am apt to think, than my primest virtue . . . don't you think so, wife?"

"I think . . . just what I said, Silas. Integrity—I was perfectly right—means wholeness, entireness, the presence of all parts. Do you call a man without a coat on his back, a man in his shirt-sleeves, an entire man? I call him a fraction of a man only, and a very vulgar fraction, too."

At this, and with a ringing laugh, Silas crossed the room towards the window.

"In this case," said he, "a man's indebted to his tailor for his integrity, and . . . he may wear out his integrity in a season . . . happen that's true at any rate."

Just then there came in front of the window an elderly man, wearing a smock-frock, and carrying a spade over his shoulder. The quality of sticking-plaster is being fast eliminated from the nature of the modern servant. But Adam Bucket was not a modern servant in any respect, save the accident of time. He was of the ancient and honorable order of the sticking-plaster. Thirty years since he was ploughman and wagoner to Silas Oldcastle; now he was gardener, wood-chopper, coal-carrier, cow-milker, and general errand-boy to the same gentleman. He meant to live and die in the service of Silas Oldcastle.

No sooner did Silas espy him than he stepped to the window, and pushing it open on its hinges like a door, he called, "Adam Bucket, Adam Bucket!"

Now Gaffer Bucket knew, firstly, that he ought to have been at work, and not playing at make-believe with a spade on his shoulder. Secondly, had he been at work on this warm day he would infallibly have been in his shirt-sleeves, like a man that meant business. Hearing the voice of Silas, his conscience smote him. With preternatural nimbleness, for a philosopher who held that all hurry was a modern invention of the devil, and showed his faith by doing everything as slowly as mortal man could, without laying himself open to the charge of doing nothing at all—he skipped round the end of the cottage, doffed his smock-frock between two winks, and came shambling back, spade in hand, crying, "Yees, marster . . . I be a-comin' . . . where be you, marster?"

"I am here."

Turning his head slowly, the philosopher gazed, with mild wonder in his infinitely placid eyes, at the figure of Silas by the window.

"Eh, marster, I thowght yow was t'other side th' 'ouse. An' there yow be i' th' windy, lookin' like a—a good picter in a poor frame," quoth Adam, slowly raising his hand to the height of his nose, signifying thereby that he had touched his cap. Finding his hand where it was, it occurred to him to draw it across his nose, which he did, and so killed two birds with one stone.

Said Silas, in a reproachful tone, "Bucket, Adam Bucket, where is your integrity?"

Adam Bucket turned his head and cast a sharp glance round the garden, as if expecting to find some implement that had been left out all night lying about. He shook his head.

"Down't know, marster."

"Haven't you got any?"

Another shake.

"Nou, marster . . . we've been out of it somewhile now . . . got some good carrot-seed left. . . ."

"It is time you sowed it then. In the orchard, hanging on the lopped apple-tree, you will find my—my integrity. Fetch it me."

"Yees, sirr."

And Adam Bucket shambled off.

"I wish you would come and sit down. I want to have a talk with you about our prospects," said Priscilla, with a little formality that was due to a ripple of mental irritation. She would not have minded the raillery of Silas, had she felt sure of Dr. Johnson's approval of her use of the word integrity. But she felt anything but sure on the point, and this troubled her.

Silas was in a waggish mood this morning; so now, glancing at the window, he answered, "Well, I must say I think the prospect is a good one."

"You think so? I am glad of it. It is the first time I have heard you say as much. You have always seemed to delight in taking a gloomy view of things."

"Ah, my dear, that was in the winter, when things generally do look dull! On this glorious May day, though, with a blue sky, and an uncommonly warm sun, God bless you, Priscilla, I think the situation just grand! We never had a finer outlook, wife, in our lives."

This he said with the vigor of enthusiasm. Priscilla put the document she was holding on her lap, folded her hands on the top of the papers, and gave her husband a look that should have made him tremble, but which only made him laugh.

Said Priscilla, severely, "Are you talking about the landscape, Silas, or our affairs?"

"Bless me . . . why . . . the landscape, to be sure! It will apply to our affairs, though, just as well, my dear. I am apt to think that they, like the spacious firmament on high, my dear . . . look pretty . . . blue. Eh, Priscilla?"

Priscilla answered not a word. But she looked . . .

Fortunately a diversion occurred just then. This was caused by the appearing of Aunt Rebecca. This lady was some years younger than her brother Silas, to whom she bore a strong likeness. She was tall and plump in figure, and had a large oval face. She wore her gray hair bowed over her temples, and fastened with tortoise combs, one of which combs, a high, handsome old thing, towered five or six inches above the top of her head. Her neck and bust were enveloped in the voluminous folds of an antique stomacher of gray and green silk; her dress was a gray woollen stuff, fashionably distended by a crinoline of royal dimensions. Thus she stood, a comely amalgam of the present and the past; yet, as a picture, she was marred by the touch of the present; but for that vile fashionable horror of a crinoline, she would have been a genuine antique.

Her glory was her large oval face. It dominated her, like the sun in the firmament. It dominated every group of faces into which it was introduced. It was like a fine old Scripture, open that all might read, and worth reading by all. The lines of womanliness—simple, tender, sweet, and strong—were all there, traced in no feeble and halting manner, but by the bold, beautiful, and subtle art of the Soul Womanly. A veil upon her face, even in the crowded street, would have seemed a petty indignity, a paltry insult, to that bright mirror of unadulterate womanhood. It was meant to be unveiled, to be looked at, like a mountain lake or a noble tree. To men of soul it always suggested the ideal. To one man, of maternity. To another, of wifehood. These men were of course Englishmen, sensible only of the English ideal. That a Frenchman, for example, would have found her face suggestive of the ideal is not so certain. Was her soul equal to her

face? Then had she been the most remarkable woman of this century. Let it be enough that in her large oval face most men found distinct suggestions of the woman's face they most loved and most honored.

Such was Miss Rebecca Oldcastle, and by the same token she was an old maid. We will not discover her most sacred secret—to wit, the number of her wooers; but so much is patent truth: no man had won her. It is an old saying—and true as old—some of the very finest fish are still in the sea, and no net of seaman, however bold, has ever caught, or will ever catch them.

People differ. Differing, they fall naturally into classes. These classes are the study and delight of the scientific mind. Thus the immortal Peter Skiptonius divided mankind in general, and the English people in particular, into two great classes—namely, those who liked Yorkshire pudding, and those who did not. There is yet another method of classification available, and though not so rigidly scientific, profound, original, and far-reaching as that of the above-named philosopher, it is nevertheless workable to a degree. According to this method, mankind in general, and the English people in particular, may be divided into, firstly, those who say what they believe; and secondly, those who believe what they say. The former is a small class, and is said to be growing smaller day by day. A few philosophers are found in it, a few ignoramuses, a few priests, but, it is rumored, not a politician in the land.

On the other hand, those who believe what they say are exceeding many. These are they who talk; and, talking, must needs say something; and having said something, feel it incumbent upon them to believe what they have said. It is the simplest and easiest way in the world of discovering one's own opinions, and constructing one's own system of belief. Say something . . . anything . . . on the spur of the moment . . . having said it, stick to it . . . seek for arguments in support of it . . . arguments in support of anything are, providentially, plenty as blackberries in summer . . . with them will come belief, and for the rest . . . This method, runs it not on all-fours with the scientific tradition of sublime Guess subsequently verified by patient experiment? So the world wags, and tongues chatter, and loose opinions flow like molten metal, and in the brazen moulds of consistency they solidify and harden into the rigidity of belief.

Easy . . . cheap . . . popular . . . sublime . . . honorable . . . latter-day method of providing one's self with a Brummegeg system of belief.

Now, mentally, Rebecca Oldcastle was chiefly remarkable in that she did not properly belong to either of these two classes, which may be said to divide between them the world. By which it is not meant to imply that she never said what she believed. On occasion she did this, and did it very well; but she was no slave to the habit. Nor yet is it insinuated that she never believed what she said. So much would not be true, for she frequently did. She possessed a set of opinions, principles, beliefs, and prejudices, which were cut if not dried. They were sensible and defensible as things go, and by them she stood like a rock; she never swerved, never doubted. Better still, she never preached, never evangelized, never crusaded. To those who did that kind of thing she always seemed, at first, a splendid subject to work upon; so unprejudiced, so eager to learn the truth, so apt of understanding. Their final impression, however, was not so complimentary: some said she understood nothing; others that she believed in nothing; others that she was good for nothing. They passed on, black storm-clouds and cold, biting winds, while she, broad-based rock, remained where she was and as she was.

She said one thing one day, and another thing the next day; but she no more felt it to be her duty to believe and adopt an opinion simply because she happened to express it, than she did to attempt to reconcile opinions that were contradictory. Thus her acrid speech was small clew to her real feeling, while sometimes behind her softest words there crouched an antagonism as strong as hate. Such was the dear, delicious woman who now appeared in the door-way, holding in her hand Silas's coat.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF FAITH AND SCEPTICISM.

SAID Rebecca Oldcastle, "I say again what I have said many a time before—that man Adam Bucket is a misunderstood and misjudged creature."

"Well, well, Reby, and what's wrong now?" inquired Silas, with an inclination to laugh.

"I did not say that anything had gone wrong. I was going to say, however, that as an acknowledged imbecile that man Bucket would be an ornament to his unfortunate class. Indeed, he would merit some praise for his occasional imitations of sanity . . . which are almost clever. As a sane man, though, he is a sad failure. Ridiculous . . . going about masquerading as a reasonable creature. . . . I never . . ."

Put in Priscilla—a little impatiently, for all her opportunities seemed to be evading her this morning—"Do not be uncharitable, dear. He has proved himself to be a devoted and faithful servant to your brother and myself for years. We have all of us our failings, you know."

Answered Rebecca, in a soft, sweet voice, "Yes, sister Priscilla, I know . . . and I know also that we often have to take sense in our friends . . . and relations . . . as we have to take goodness . . . for granted . . . and to shut our eyes to . . . to evidence. Still, when a man hands me a coat, and says, 'Please, mar'm, here be marster's integrity,' and won't be convinced that integrity is not the proper name for the garment, it is my opinion that he is an idiot. And I told him so."

At this Silas laughed aloud. Then, with sudden gravity, he said, "Reby, Reby, you are too sharp with the old fellow. If idiocy lurks in ignorance, the wisest may well own himself a fool."

"Speaking of fools, brother . . . a man without a grain of philosophy in his composition should not try to talk like a philosopher."

Silas put on his coat, still laughing as he remarked, "Why, Reby, you don't know everything. You don't even know your own age. You think you are only forty-nine, whereas you will be sixty in—"

"Oh, you cowardly . . . contemptible . . . mean . . . wicked . . . slanderous . . . monster! If I had my parasol I would beat you with it. To dare to say I . . . your only sister . . . am guilty of being threescore ye . . ."

"I never said so. I . . ."

"Hear him, sister, eating . . . swallowing his own words, and . . . choke, bad man!"

"Silas, I am ashamed of you. You are not yourself this morning," observed Priscilla, reproachfully, for to her it was all real.

"I was going to add that Rebecca would be a certain age in . . . so many years . . . when, like the ill-behaved girl she is, she interrupted me. I have never said, Reby, and I never will say, that you are a day older than twenty-eight last summer."

"Oh, oh! insult to injury. . . . Oh, oh! I shall faint . . . sister . . . my vinaigrette . . . quick . . . I gave it you on Sunday in church." And Rebecca sank helplessly onto the sofa.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried Priscilla. "It is in my best black silk dress pocket, that is hanging behind the closet door."

She made an effort to rise, but the papers, the precious papers, flew to the right and the left, and she had to stoop and pick them up, dropping two as she picked up one. On her knees, she turned a despairing glance on Silas, whose features were firm as iron.

"Silas, help me . . . call Margaret . . . tell her to fetch it . . . cannot you. . . ."

Silas rushed wildly out.

Said Priscilla, soothingly, turning her head towards Rebecca while she darted out her arm in an opposite direction to seize a straying document half under the fender, "Wait a moment, dear, don't faint yet. Margaret will soon be here."

This was too much for Rebecca, whose sense of humor was as active as Priscilla's was dull.

She sat bolt upright of a sudden, and said, "If I cannot faint when I wish to, I will not faint at all."

"Very well, dear," responded Priscilla, complacently. "But I make it a rule, as you know, never to faint without having my smelling-salts at hand."

Just then Silas re-entered the room, followed in a few moments by Margaret. The latter had on a broad-brimmed hat and a coquettishly shaped garden-apron; she carried in one hand a light rake, and in the other an old-fashioned silver vinaigrette. Altogether she made a picturesque appearance, and might have been taken for one of the characters in a pastoral comedy. One had only to note the look on her face, the tone of her voice, as she sprang to the side of her aunt Rebecca, exclaiming, "Aunt, dear, what is it? What is the matter? Do you feel ill?" to feel quite sure that these two, at least, understood each other, and were close friends.

Rebecca took the vinaigrette with a smile, and rising to her feet, answered, "Ill? No, child, I am not ill . . . I never felt better in my life, but . . . I am wroth . . . angry . . . indignant . . . what shall I say?"

"Say consumedly ragged, Reby," put in Silas.

Continued Rebecca, "Your father, child . . . my brother . . . my only brother . . . thank Heaven for the same . . . has been rude, rude and unkind to me."

"Never mind him, aunt. He is only an ugly old graybeard."

Here Miss Margaret shot a terribly fierce look at the grim tyrant, then she ran to him and filched a kiss boldly from his bad lips, next she gave his short gray beard a vicious tug, and in a flash was back to her aunt, saying, "Come with me into the garden, aunt, and when . . . we get to the door . . . we will make faces at him."

Then she whispered, "Oh, do let us get away from those horrible papers before mamma begins!"

A look of intelligence, a swift smile, and a slight toss of the head constituted Rebecca's answer. She also had had more than enough of her sister-in-law's documents.

As they moved towards the door Priscilla said, "Margaret, I should like you, and your aunt also, if she will be so kind, to remain in the room a while."

"Thank Heaven, I am not to be left alone!" murmured Silas to himself, who had seen the design of the two to escape with dismay, and had even begun himself to edge cautiously after them.

Added Priscilla, in a serious tone, "I have something important to communicate to you. And I really think, Margaret, you

ought to begin to show a little more interest in what so closely concerns you. You do not deserve the good-fortune that awaits you."

"Ah me!" sighed the girl, gently pushing her aunt onto the sofa, and seating herself beside her, "I have heard this many a year that good-fortune was awaiting me. But though I have dressed myself in my very best, and stood at the garden gate, and walked up and down the green lane, I have never managed to meet with . . . it . . . her . . . him, be its gender masculine, feminine, or neuter. Mamma, dear, I think I am entitled now to sit down, fold my hands so, and await good-fortune, and see if it . . . she . . . he can find me."

She sat with clasped hands, and an arch look on her pretty face, gazing at Silas, who laughed at her, thinking within his proud heart that she was the bonniest lassie that ever called a happy man dad. This, however, was all lost upon Priscilla. A sudden thought had started her rummaging through her documents, so that she had heard not a word of Margaret's naughty speech. Aunt Rebecca could be as patient as a bee or as impatient as a wasp. Just now she resembled not the bee.

"Well, bless me," she broke out, "you might be Queen Victoria herself, and I one of your maids of honor! I suppose you wish to tell me that you need . . ."

"I know, Rebecca, you think . . ." began Priscilla, putting down her papers, and smiling in a calm, superior way.

"Yes," interrupted Rebecca, with a rival smile, "I do think . . . occasionally . . . and it is not a bad habit either. It is one you might try . . . for an experiment . . . sister Priscilla. I think . . . you very well know . . . that you are on a wild-goose chase. I don't mind keeping you all till Silas can find something to do . . . which he never will . . . it is about all the good an old maid like me can do in this world, though . . . in the next world . . . perhaps . . . we shall have a higher department of activity assigned us than that of . . . paying other people's debts. But I do not feel inclined to waste any more money on this wretched Twigg affair. So if that . . ."

"I was not going to do anything of the kind. Though I thank you, Rebecca, for letting me know that I must apply . . . elsewhere . . . if I needed assistance."

"Elsewhere!" sniffed Rebecca, a bit contemptuously; "that is

good. You think that somebody . . . not to name names . . . who has been everywhere, and has come from the mountains of the moon . . . or some strange island of the sea . . . or some foreign penitentiary . . . or perhaps Dartmoor itself . . . is going to do wonders for you. It is not the first time the fox has tricked the goose."

"Thank you, sister; but Mr. Digby Roy is no more a fox than I am a goose."

"Then I will change the metaphor, and call it the fable of the wolf and the sheep."

"At any rate, Reby, you will admit that he put us on the track of Conrad Twigg. Piupetaw, Wyoming, was a No-man's-land to us till he turned up," put in Silas, chivalrously, hoping to draw some of the fire of Rebecca's heavy guns to himself. But his consort had heavy metal of her own, and was never less inclined to strike her flag to the enemy.

Said she, "And more than that, he has actually gone all the way to Wyoming to secure for us, if possible, the necessary affidavits. The friend in need is the friend indeed."

"I know he says he has lived in the States, and the chances are he came away and forgot to pay his lawful debts. And now he has gone to see if all his creditors are dead," said Rebecca, and a criminal barrister might have envied her the tone and air of absolute conviction and dead certainty which she assumed.

Silas laughed, and cried, "That's first-rate, Reby. Call him a thief, and then say he has been called one, and therefore is one. What a jolly queer world it would be if women only had the working of it!"

For a moment, and in a flash, Rebecca dropped her weapons of war, and turning to Silas with a comical look of amusement upon her face, remarked, "Wouldn't it just?"

Then she returned to the attack with, "Did you not give him a written authority to disburse what moneys he thought necessary on your behalf?"

"Certainly," replied Priscilla; "and he is paying his own expenses besides. Greater generosity I have never met with."

"Some day you will get a bill of expenses. And who will pay it, I wonder? Not me."

"We shall pay him out of the estate," answered Priscilla, loftily.

"Estate . . . fiddlesticks . . . which estate? . . . the one in Ireland . . . or the one in Scotland . . . or the one in Wales . . . or the one in Nova Scotia . . . or the one in Yorkshire . . . or the one in Cornwall? Why don't you lay claim to the moon at once? I am sure some of your ancestors must have lived there."

But unwavering faith is always impervious to ridicule—in which fact, perhaps, lies the ridiculousness of unwavering faith in anything under the sun—and the only effect it had upon Priscilla Oldcastle was to kindle her pity for the poor wretch who employed it.

So now, with beautiful patience, she quietly remarked, "The estates you mention have, I fear, slipped away from me. The estate I refer to is the one we are now engaged upon . . . the one in Peakshire."

"Thank you, sister, for your information. So it's the one in Peakshire, is it? It is a large and valuable one, I believe?"

"I believe it is worth upwards of one hundred and seventy thousand pounds."

"That includes the rabbits, I suppose?"

"It includes everything."

"Dear me! . . . I wonder how much they allowed for each rabbit? . . . How they managed to count them all, I can't make out . . . and the young ones that didn't come out to feed. I dare say . . . Silas, your mirth is unseasonable. If you cannot . . ."

"He will break a blood-vessel some day, I tell him . . . laughing like a big ploughboy."

But Silas only laughed the more.

Rebecca turned her back upon him, as a mark of severe disapproval, as she said, "And do you really think that you are going to get hold of that wonderful estate, rabbits and all?"

The smile that lit up the sweet face of Priscilla was unanswerable, so full was it of conviction and triumph. Rebecca noted it with amazement. It almost staggered her. Nay, more, that smile was to her scepticism like warm sunshine playing on sheet-ice. She felt the ice melting away from her.

"Why," she broke out, "the very last time you heard from him, he wrote, 'Things look mighty queer. I am afraid the worst has happened, but I will do what I can.' If that means anything, it means that Conrad Twigg married, and left either a child or a will. Or he may be even living himself. You are de-

luding yourself, Priscilla. You have not only built a castle in the air, but you have furnished it, and are actually living in it. I say your chances are not worth sixpence at public auction."

Meanwhile the sunshine still played and the ice was melting, whether or not the peculiar quality of faith is to subdue reason.

"Listen!" said Priscilla, as the last word fell from Rebecca's lips.

Listening, they heard the cathedral clock strike twelve, followed by the regular chimes.

"If he walks, he will be here in ten minutes. With a cab he should be here any moment now," said Priscilla, speaking as to herself.

"Who will be here?" inquired Silas.

"Our friend . . . Mr. Roy."

Silas. Nonsense!

Rebecca. What!

Margaret. Oh, mamma!

} Simultaneously.

Priscilla drew from her pocket a telegram, and said, with a fine affectation of calmness, "It is quite true. He has evidently had a quick passage home. I received this telegram some little time before I sent for you, Silas. It reads: '*Shall reach Abbeystead at eleven fifty. Good news.—Digby Roy.*' Now, Rebecca, we shall see who is the fox and who is the goose."

At this Rebecca made her a low courtesy, and said, "And while you are making these interesting discoveries in the animal kingdom, I will go and don my best black dress. Then I shall feel myself properly attired to offer you my condolences when Mr. Roy . . . and hope . . . are gone."

"Get along with you! One would think you had got blood-poisoning, Reby," called out Silas, as his sister made her exit.

"Whereas," murmured Margaret, "her blood is sweet. The acid is only on her tongue."

The sound of wheels was heard of a sudden, and Silas stepped quickly to the window.

"Here's a hack outside," he exclaimed, "and, as I live, here he is! Fresh as ever. Just as though he had stepped out of a bandbox."

Mother and daughter sprang forward to have a look.

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Priscilla, in a low tone. But

Margaret grew suddenly pale, and drew back, and slipped away unnoticed.

Her thought was: "I would as soon see the small-pox or typhus-fever come walking along the garden-path, as Mr. Digby Roy."

CHAPTER XVII.

OF A FAMILIAR FACE.

"BACK again, you see, my friends, just like a bad penny."

"Nay, nay, rather like a golden sovereign, Mr. Roy. I am so glad to see you," exclaimed Priscilla, as she took the hand of the new-comer and held it with both her own.

He was a well-built, handsome man, verging, apparently, on forty; rather tall, and with just rotundity enough to his figure to suggest comfort, solidity, and dignity. Silas, we know, had described him as being as "fresh as ever. Just as though he had stepped out of a bandbox." But Silas had not the gift—few people have—of impromptu characterization. In so far as his words suggested anything resembling the neat, trim, dapper, coxcombical order of being, they were ridiculously inappropriate and misleading.

There was, indeed, an air of distinction about Mr. Digby Roy, and he looked a very well-dressed man, though he wore nothing more superfine than good Scotch tweeds. His clothes fitted him—a small item, but one that is necessarily effective among a people whose clothes very seldom fit them. His freshness was not of the pink-and-white kind, but consisted of a deep flush of animal health, that imparted a peculiar richness to the overspreading tan of wind and weather. He looked a man of travel, a man of the world, a gentleman. He did not look in the least like Rebecca's broken jailbird, or skipper of debts. And why Mademoiselle Margaret should less prefer a sight of him than of an embodiment of typhus-fever or small-pox seemed altogether a dark mystery. Many women liked him exceedingly, and more would have liked him had he taken the least pains to conceal the fact that he did not like them. His face, his eyes—are we dreaming, or did we not see them, ten long years ago, gazing out towards the sea

from the top of Dunrigg? No, it is no dream. The light brown hair is now an iron-gray, and the well-moulded mouth and chin, no longer bare, are hidden beneath a thick and carefully-trimmed beard. But the fine, long, delicately-chiselled face, and the deep blue eyes, these never belonged to but one man on earth. These are as they were, though all else, even the tones of his voice, seemed changed. It is Philip Tuer, with the touch of time and fortune upon him.

Nature is full of unachieved purposes, of unfulfilled designs, of ideas only half realized. Nor does this vacillancy repel us, rather does it attract, being a strange note of weakness in the midst of strength, and having an accent almost human. Looking closely, among the baffled purposes of Nature may be detected the endeavor to make the human countenance a faithful mirror of the human character. An excellent idea in the abstract, and one that might be worked to advantage in Paradise, but open to serious objections when considered in relation to our friends and neighbors, who are still in the flesh. Questionless we do carry the complete record of our lives graven upon our countenances; but that in symbols so mysterious, hieroglyphic, and infinitely subtle as that no man may read them. Here and there, and now and then, Nature still struggles with the vernacular, and prints and damns a face with a sentence in such plain and honest English as, "Thou art a rogue!" and "Thou a fool!" Beyond this, her effort mostly miscarries; she resumes her dark and crabbed tongue, which is easier read by bright-eyed babes, by superior dogs, and by wise-witted horses, than any *sabio*, *savant*, or philosopher in the land.

Looking at Digby Roy's face, imprinted with the sure lines of breeding and intelligence, it seemed impossible that it should belong to the man who had dealt as Philip Tuer dealt with poor David Reed and Francisca, Countess of Eden. Ten years of soiled consciousness had played upon his face, to all appearance, as it had been helpless water splashing upon smooth firm rock, scooping no hollow, cutting no channel. The additional lines hinted not a syllable of crime or cruelty, but, on the other hand, spoke plainly of gathered experience, of matured character, and of worldly wisdom. Even his body, with its increased girth and easy, graceful carriage, was suggestive of good conscience no less than of a generous diet.

Silas greeted Digby Roy with a hearty shake of the hand, exclaiming, "Welcome, sir, welcome home. Glad you have escaped capture by the mermaids. Why didn't you write and let us know when to expect you?"

"I did; but what was the use? On the day I finished my work I sat down and wrote you a letter and posted it. I took the eastward-bound train the same evening, and saw the mail-bag, in which was my letter, come aboard at the same time. I went on board the boat the same night that I reached New York; again I had the pleasure of seeing the mail arrive. We had a quick passage, only ten days from Sandy Hook to Queenstown, and when we landed at Liverpool I caught the express and came right through to Abbeystead. To-morrow morning, I dare say, you will get my letter. In a race of five thousand miles, I have beaten the mail by eighteen or twenty hours," said Digby Roy, in a tone and with a smile that might have suggested to the intelligent foreigner that he was in the presence of the originator and organizer of the wonderful system of travelling that made such feats possible.

Many men of small imagination are equal to sudden heats and glows of enthusiasm which are but momentary, are but verbal, are but, one might almost say, pretence. Silas was one of them.

"Glorious, sir, glorious!" he cried, with a fine show of enthusiasm; "that is what I call travelling, with a vengeance. Priscilla, give me the key of the chiffoniere. After racing the royal mail five thousand miles and winning at a canter, Mr. Roy will probably appreciate a couple of biscuits and a glass of sherry, or—vice versa, eh; Mr. Roy?"

"Then let it be—vice versa, Mr. Oldcastle."

"Good, very good . . . one biscuit . . . two sherries . . . I go with you, sir . . . Priscilla, my dear . . . occasion ministering and opportunity serving, what say you? . . . ditto? . . . two biscuits and one sherry, eh? . . . well, well, my dear, it will agree with you better, perhaps."

Priscilla drank Mr. Roy's health, with a pretty little speech and a quaint little courtesy thrown in, that completely transformed a commonplace compliment into a bit of gracious ceremony. Silas also drank Mr. Roy's health with a full glass. Then he drank Priscilla's, with another full glass. And next, remarking that if charity did not, for reasons polite, always begin at home, it ought

always to end there, he filled his glass a third time and drank his own health with gusto.

"And now," said Digby Roy, toying with his wine-glass, "I am going at once to set your minds at rest by telling you what I have done, as the lawyers would say, *re* Conrad Twigg. To begin at the end—I have succeeded, and the Twigg estate is yours."

Priscilla gave a great start, her face flushed suddenly and as quickly paled, she clasped her hands nervously together, while a sound escaped her like the gulping of a sob.

"I repeat, the estate is yours," said Digby Roy, and there was no doubt about it—his voice trembled in sympathy with Priscilla's emotion.

"Silas, Silas," she murmured, "do you hear? Mine . . . mine . . . at last."

And this time the sob and tear came unchecked.

Said Silas, with a ludicrous effort to veil the real meaning of the quick twitching of his facial muscles, "Not at last, my dear, at first. At last it's mine, for what is yours is mine. We two are one, you know. Hurrah for unity! Oh, wife, wife, don't!"

He rose to his feet hurriedly, crossed to the window and, looking out, coughed loudly, and made noise enough with his nose to startle a phlegmatic rook that was perched on the swaying point of a tall poplar at the far end of his garden, dreaming that summer had come. There followed an interval of silence, silence noteworthy, being charged with emotion too deep, too enthralling for speech. Such moments are always rare, when the deep fountains of our nature are unsealed and the sacred waters touch our spirits and cause them to bloom with quick and magical fertility.

Presently Priscilla murmured, "And we owe it all to you. Oh, how can we ever repay you for your kindness, Mr. Roy?"

An exaggeration this, born of gratitude.

"A trifle, a mere trifle, my dear lady, which I beg of you not to magnify. I have long made it a rule to keep no account of the small debts of friendship. I am no miser that I should count every copper of kindness I distribute to my friends."

An exaggeration this, born of generosity.

Said Silas, speaking from his chest, and clothing his words with the dignity of a full, brave utterance, "Therein speaks a noble heart, friend Roy. Great natures are not careful to measure the

greatness of their actions, though smaller men may very well find a merit in coming after them with rule and measuring line."

An exaggeration this, born of admiration.

Spake we not of waters, of human spirits, of quick and magical fertility? Behold the proof. None the less true, because the waters sink, and the fertility fades, and selfishness, like Mr. Pope's black melancholy, arrays the landscape of the soul in the bare and sere livery of winter, and "breathes a browner horror o'er the woods."

"Nay, spare me, friend Oldcastle," laughed Digby Roy, rising without much difficulty to the unaccustomed altitude of "friend," "or you will put my modesty to the blush. I am delighted to have been of some little service to you. I hope you will not forget me in your new splendor."

Cried Priscilla, "Oh, how can you even think of such a thing! But for you we should never have been able to supply the missing link."

"Yes, I think you are right there. It was no easy matter, but I have done it. Let me see, I really forget what you said the estate was worth?"

"About a hundred and seventy thousand, I think," answered Priscilla.

"A very nice little windfall," laughed Digby Roy.

"Yes, yes. With economy it ought to keep us out of the work-house . . . and perhaps . . . on Sundays . . . we might afford a fowl in the pot, eh, Mr. Roy?"

"Yes, and a chunk of bacon, too, don't you think, Mr. Oldcastle?"

"I don't know, I don't know. We musn't be too extravagant . . . one hundred and seventy thousand pounds worth of land . . . bless my soul! . . . take some ploughing and sowing . . . Squire Oldcastle, ahem! . . . your humble servant, sir . . . make me a J.P., I suppose . . . happen they'll want to make me an M.P., . . . happen I shall make myself an A.S.S. . . . Priscilla, is there a title with the estate?"

"No, I am sorry to say there is not, Silas."

"Thank Heaven for the same. If I had to wear a coronet all day I should give it up as a bad job," responded Silas, joining chorus with Digby Roy in laughter that reached so far as the ears of Gaffer Bucket, who leaned on his spade, nodded his head

knowingly towards the open window, and dropped into a deep, slow-footed laugh, that broke up his face curiously, and shook his frame till the tears dropped from his eyes, and killed some minutes of time, which was the next best thing to killing so many weeds.

"Silas, why are you so absurd? Do try and be quiet. I want Mr. Roy to tell us all about it," said Priscilla. Then to Digby Roy, "So Conrad Twigg is really dead?"

"Yes; and died quite romantically, in a fight with some Indians. They buried him, too, in proper style—in a natural clearing in a great forest, and they heaped a great pile of stones above his grave."

"Well, well, that's first-rate. I never really believed in red-skins, do you know . . . suspected they were invented, you know, by romancers . . . if they killed a thirty-first cousin of mine by marriage, though . . . Gad! I always thought he was little better than an invention, too . . . my faith in men and things is on the . . ."

Meanwhile Priscilla was murmuring, half to herself, "Dear me, how strange, to travel so far to meet his death at the proper time! Mysterious are the ways of Providence. Had he stayed at home he would have avoided those terrible Indians. Perhaps he would have been alive now. Perhaps he would have left an heir. Who knows? Ah, it was not to be, it was not to be! How many years ago did you say it was since it happened?"

"Nineteen years ago last autumn," answered Digby Roy.

"The very year, wife, when you first began to develop serious symptoms of being, as Reby would say, mad."

"If it is madness, I was mad a long year before that. But I know what you mean. You refer to my claim to the Adle estate. At that time I knew nothing of the Twigg property. I first learned of that fourteen years ago, and I have never ceased collecting evidence from that day to this. I have, for the last fourteen years, had a strong presentiment amounting, I might say, to a firm conviction, of my right to the Twigg estate," said Priscilla, in the proud-humble tone of one speaking, in self-justification, of personal virtue exercised under trying conditions.

"But, my dear lady," cried Digby Roy, with some surprise in his tone, "as I understand it, at that time, fourteen years ago, there were four lives intervening between you and the Twigg estate?"

"Precisely so; you are quite right, my dear sir. Moreover, they were sound and healthy lives. But as I say, I had a presentiment—nay, a conviction—that all would come right. And it has, you see."

"Proof of the pudding is . . . best proof in the world . . . eh, Mr. Roy?"

"Yes, but—"

Continued Priscilla, "The four sound, healthy lives, where are they? Man's breath is in his nostrils. He is as a flower of the field. They are gone—they had to go. Then for three years the missing link could not be supplied. We were baffled entirely. My daughter was a giddy girl at school; she knew nor cared anything about it. My sister-in-law mocked my 'madness.' Even Silas, there, my husband, talked about bees humming in one's bonnet, and laughed, being a sad sceptic. Did I doubt? Did I despair? Did my presentiment weaken? Did—"

Broke in Silas, "Well, now, to speak frankly, I think it did, do you know."

"What did?" cried Priscilla, with a look of astonishment.

"I don't quite know, come to think of it. But you know you did nothing but talk, talk, talk about it from early morning till you heard me snoring beside you in bed at night."

"Silas, I am ashamed of you. But if I did, what then?"

"Well, it struck me, now and then, wife, that you talked so much for the same reason as the boy whistled so loud when he was passing the gibbet, you know."

At this Priscilla smiled a sweet, forgiving, pitying smile.

"You were never more mistaken in your life," she said; "but it is characteristic of Doubt to doubt even the genuineness of Faith. As I was saying, Mr. Roy, for three years I was baffled entirely. What happened? You, a stranger in these parts, came and settled close to us. Why? Because it was your destiny to aid us. Some may call them accidental circumstances; I call them the threads of destiny. I knew it would come all right sooner or later. I had a presentiment."

A light laugh broke from Digby Roy, and a curious smile crossed his face as he said, "Madam, you are a woman of sublime faith—you believe in destiny, in the long chain that starts from the foot of Jupiter. I am proud to believe that I was specially created to serve as one of your stepping-stones to fortune."

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF A LITTLE SECRET.

THE day when Mr. Digby Roy arrived at The Pines with his good news was, appropriately enough, warm and fine, with a touch of summer in it. When Mr. Digby Roy took his leave, which was not for some hours, he informed Priscilla, in a little confidential aside, that he would call again at the first convenient moment, as he had something important to communicate. He said this with such a pleasant smile that, had our lady of fancy been the most pessimistic instead of the most optimistic soul alive, she might very well have found nothing in his words or manner on which to hang the smallest shred of fear or disquietude. In truth, she thought nothing more of them, being full of her new joy, her good-fortune, her success.

'Twere pleasant to tarry with her a while, and see how bravely, withal how modestly, she wore her triumph; with what toothless and gentle malice she took a fair revenge on Rebecca; with what pretty skill she fashioned a quaint, fantastic, gilded world, wherein she placed her family and herself as the chief and choicest pieces of furniture.

Meanwhile something noteworthy as pertaining to the United Kingdom happened—the morrow and the morrow were fine and summery. Three consecutive days of blue sky and warm air—wonderful at any time—were miraculous in May. But Mr. Digby Roy came not. On the fourth day this freakish spell of summerliness went like a dream, and folk felt more comfortable in their minds as their bodies shivered in a cold east wind, that seemed like a dear familiar creature quite at home. The wind suddenly fell, and with it the rain in torrents; and Use and Wont again displayed their sceptre, *Anglicè*, opened their umbrellas, chuckling as they shook the rain-drops from their nose. Then, in gaiters and mackintosh, scorning an umbrella, and looking like a drowned rat, Mr. Digby Roy called at The Pines.

Being a bit of a psychologist, that gentleman had, indeed, been impatiently waiting during the last seventy hours or so for the weather to break. Some news, he said to himself, matched with a blue sky and an atmosphere glinting with sunshine, while other news did not. A canopy of gray cloud, with a moaning wind or a pelting rain, were fit elemental accessories of the latter. Knowledge of ourselves, our neighbors, the world—in a word, consciousness—is attained only and solely through our physical organs. We cannot reach the impenetrable mystery of mind save by an elaborate organization of material ducts and channels. On our five senses play ceaseless streams of color, light, sound, and form. The climate touches them, and heat and darkness, and motion and food, and a thousand other things. These things, touching and modifying our senses, ultimately touch and modify the soul itself. This being so—and who can doubt it?—would not a blue sky, by predisposing the mind to certain impressions, tend to give full effect to one piece of news, while a canopy of gray cloud and a pelting rain would tend to give full effect to another piece of news? Right or wrong, such was Mr. Digby Roy's philosophy, and acting on the same, he delayed his visit to The Pines until the weather had broken.

Priscilla was in high spirits, for that morning she had received a letter from the trustees of the Twigg estate, expressing satisfaction with the documents she had forwarded them, and intimating that, as soon as the Court gave its sanction, they would have pleasure in handing over to her in due form the property they held in trust.

"It's a flood-tide, and we are on it this time," observed Silas, when Mr. Digby Roy had finished reading the letter in question.

"Yes, everything goes swimmingly. I am glad they are satisfied with my part of the work," responded Mr. Digby Roy.

"We shall take possession this summer, I expect. You will be one of our very first guests, I hope, Mr. Roy?"

"Oh, thanks. Some day when you are nicely settled, and company is scarce, I shall hope to run down and see you. Do you know, I am awfully glad the trustees are not pigs. It would have been just like them to have opposed your claim instead of admitting it."

"I should have won, all the same," answered Priscilla.

"Doubtless. Still, it would have meant delay, and expense,

and, possibly, failure. The law—doesn't it say somewhere in the Bible?—is not made for the righteous, but for the other kind of gentry."

"You are about right, barring the exact words, I'm apt to think," laughed Silas.

"If it is not in the Bible, it is a pity, we will say so much, for it is true. Law was made for rogues, and it serves them well. And so, with the best claim in the world, you might have been defeated. By-the-bye, Mrs. Oldcastle, I never really mastered all the genealogical intricacies of the case. Is it asking too much—"

"Dear me, no; not at all, Mr. Roy. I shall be delighted. It is the simplest thing in the world, when once you get the clew. I have got a tree here that will show you everything at a glance."

And Priscilla rose with alacrity, and unlocked a small cupboard wherein she stored her precious documents. And Silas rose also, and woe looked sadly out of his eyes.

"You are going to talk shop . . . heaven help me! . . . I hoped it was forever . . . excuse me, Mr. Roy . . . I have an engagement . . . I can't stand it . . . I'm ill . . . I'll be back soon."

And Silas left the room in a hurry. And a yoke of oxen could not have drawn him back again. Mr. Digby Roy laughed lightly. Silas had done just what he wished him to do. But a shadow of vexation rested on the face of Priscilla as she reseated herself and laid upon the table a handful of documents.

"Really, I don't know what to think of my husband. He—"

"Yes, I understand. He does not like to be bored."

"Poor dear man, he cares really for nothing but land. Land and sheep, and cows and horses, they form his world. In thinking of the estate he thinks only of these things. He would rather own a hundred acres, I believe, than have a hundred thousand pounds in solid gold."

"Which shows, I think, that two people may live together and be happy though their tastes are not in all things alike."

"Yes, that is true. And yet, dear me, I remember the time when, if any one had told me I should ever marry Silas Oldcastle, I should have thought them demented."

"Yet now, no doubt, you think you might have travelled farther and fared worse?"

"Yes, indeed. When I think what would have happened to me if I had accepted Sir Joseph— There, there, I was forget-

ting," said Priscilla, hastily, while a faint blush overspread her sweet, chastened face.

"Ah, now, I call that cruel. You show me a feather from the bright wing of romance, but will not show me the body of the wonderful bird. I am full of interest, and I am discretion in person. Pray, proceed."

"Some day, perhaps, I will tell you a bit of my history. It is a bit of true romance, it seems to me. But just now—"

"It rains too hard. A gay bird should fly under a blue sky, eh? Colors gleam only in the sunshine. Yes, you are right. I have something I want to tell you alone."

"I do not think we shall be interrupted. Is it anything very serious?" inquired Priscilla, in a strange tone.

Words are nothing compared with tones. Harken unto words, and creatures sad, timorous, and despairing, are swelling with hope and joy and bravery. The world is full of brave words and sad accents. The tone of perfect confidence unalloyed with doubt is exceeding rare, and, for the same reason, is, when heard, exceeding strange. In Priscilla's tone one heard the note of entire disbelief in the existence of "anything very serious." Mr. Digby Roy caught it, and its echo seemed to awaken and fill his mind with the multitudinous hummings of wonder. He looked at her for some moments steadily, with wide-open eyes, without knowing it. When he became conscious of what he was doing, and beheld the growing expression of surprise on Priscilla's face, he passed his hand over his eyes, and gave a low, mellow laugh.

"What odd creatures we are!" he said, lightly, "I believe I was staring at you, and yet I did not know you were in front of me. And my thoughts were away off in another and a better world. Let me see, I think you asked me if it was anything serious? Well, that all depends upon how you look at it. If you catch the right angles of things—well, I question if anything in this world is very serious, or matters much."

"Oh, do you believe that? I don't," exclaimed Priscilla.

"Then we will not discuss it. I keep my arguments for my enemies. With my friends, I think their thoughts and feel their sympathies, or at least I try to. Now, I want to have a talk with you about your affairs. As I understand it, the case is this: under the will of Jonathan Twigg, the original testator, your

first cousin, Conrad Twigg, inherited the estate in the capacity of remainder man?"

"Just so," answered Priscilla, who was now in her element.

"And, of course, he was free to will it to whom he liked?"

"Precisely."

"The father of Conrad Twigg was a gentleman?"

"Oh yes, indeed; he was a J.P. As a very little girl, I remember seeing him once on a white cob. He looked a proud, handsome man, I thought. Ah me! if—"

"Yes, I know. Those ifs are the ox-fences one has to get over in the hunt of life. And a man need not be proud, or handsome, or a J.P., or mounted on a good stiff white cob, to encounter them. Well, his father being a gentleman, Conrad Twigg was also a gentleman by the best sign going save one, to wit, fact. As a matter of fact, Conrad Twigg was not a gentleman in any other sense than that he was the son of his father. He formed bad habits; mixed with low company; lost caste. Finally, he was suspected of being one of a gang of skilful forgers, and fled the country to avoid arrest. Let me see, how long is that since?"

"Thirty-three years next month."

"He went to Paris, to Moscow, to Teheran. Then to Australia, then to the West Indies, and, lastly, to the Wild West of America. Geography is not my forte, but I think I am right?"

"Yes, you are quite right."

"There is a sort of tradition in the family, though no documentary evidence in support of it exists, that in America he assumed the name of Harold Crook. On the other hand, there is in existence documentary evidence, to wit, a letter of his to an uncle at home, that he assumed the name of Nathan Flint. Under that name he wrote several letters home: this for a year or two, after which there followed an unbroken silence of—how many years?"

"Twenty-seven years last Christmas."

"Now, within the last eighteen months the last tenant for life of the estate devised by Jonathan Twigg, old Major Twigg, has died. Meanwhile you have claimed the estate as the next heirs-at-law, and the trustees admit the validity of your claim, on one condition."

"Yes," broke in Priscilla, with a change of tense, "they said

that I must prove that Conrad Twigg, *alias* Nathan Flint, had died childless and intestate. A ridiculous idea, when the chances were that years and years ago he was, as you say, scalped and eaten by those nasty red Indians."

"Pardon me, but I don't think I said—at least I had no authority for saying—that they scalped and ate him. They did nothing of the kind. Still, as you say, a ridiculous idea, truly. Nevertheless, the enemy—I mean the trustees—had to be humored. The question was, how could it be done?"

"Yes," said Priscilla, "that was the question. Of course, I knew that all would come right in the long-run; but at the time, I confess, I was fairly baffled. Where Piupetaw was I had not the remotest idea. I wrote to the postmaster at New York, and he replied, saying that he did not know of such a place. Then I sat down and waited."

A low laugh broke from her companion. Then he said: "Meanwhile my destiny, which was to serve you, was fulfilling itself. Coming from the ends of the earth, I made your acquaintance. 'Had I ever been in America?' Yes. 'Had I ever heard of a place called Piupetaw?' Piupetaw? Piupetaw? Why, certainly; a settlement among the Black Hills, on Poisoned Arrow Creek. 'A post-town?' No town at all, and a day's journey from the nearest trail of a post-boy. 'Ah, then no wonder nobody knew anything about it.' Do you remember it all?"

"Shall I ever forget it, I wonder."

"Well, I have been to Piupetaw once more, and a dreary hole it is. Not but what the scenery is fine enough—and I have extracted gold out of it. I have secured in proper legal form copies of marriage and death registers, administration papers, and sworn affidavits, all of which go to show that David Flint died childless and intestate. You have all the evidence required, and the trustees are about to surrender possession to you."

"Yes, it's wonderful. The dream, nay, the belief of my life, is realized. I always knew that there was a large estate somewhere or other that belonged to me, and would be mine some day. People have laughed at me, thought me mad, and sometimes have hinted as much. My sister-in-law, Rebecca Oldcastle, is not even yet convinced. She says she will believe in it when she sees me in actual possession, and not before. I believe my husband, in his heart of hearts, looks upon it as a cunning dream, from which he

will soon awake to find himself Silas the Unlucky, the impecunious. But I am forgetting. You had something to tell me?" And Priscilla crossed her hands and, leaning back in her chair, began to rock herself slowly.

"Yes, yes; that is true. I, too, had almost forgotten it, listening to your strange story of the realized dream. It is a little secret I have to tell you. Promise me that it shall remain a secret known only to us two, until I release you from the bond."

Priscilla ceased rocking, leaned forward in a listening attitude, and said, smiling: "You dreadful man! I give you my promise, though. I think I can keep a secret if I try hard."

Mr. Digby Roy bent towards his listener, and in a low voice said, "*Nathan Flint was not Conrad Twigg!*"

Priscilla started violently, sat bolt upright, and, with her hands half raised, gasped, "What do you say?"

"Be calm, dear Mrs. Oldcastle. Try and not excite—"

"Not excite myself, when the whole world seems to be slipping from under me! I am not excited, sir. What was that you said?"

"Simply that Nathan Flint was not Conrad Twigg."

"Simply! Simply! Why, it's all—it's everything! Oh, oh, that I had died, or Rebecca—"

"Now, now, pray, do not distress me—I mean, yourself—like that. I didn't think you would, or I wouldn't for the world have—you mistake the—you have lost nothing—the—"

"Do you call the Twigg estate nothing? Cruel! cruel! To keep me all this time—"

At this point Priscilla fairly broke down, and a flood of tears followed, and an avalanche of sobs. She might well weep, for her solid world, iridescent and beautiful, had, in a flash, become a tinted bladder, wind-blown, pin-pricked, empty, crumpled like a bit of tissue-paper in a child's fist. Moreover, Aunt Rebecca, amid this wreck of a world, remained. She was no bladder; she was a rock. She would have to be reckoned with. Priscilla might well weep. Mr. Digby Roy did nothing to check this flow of tears; on the contrary, he once or twice skilfully stimulated it by expressions of sympathy worded most subtly. In this, also, he was playing philosopher.

At length, however, her emotion subsided, and Priscilla exclaimed, "For Heaven's sake, tell me what it means—let me know all!"

“Willingly, dear lady, now that you are calm enough to look at things in their right light. Conrad Twigg assumed the name of Harold Crook, and kept it to his dying day. Soon after he reached America he struck up a great friendship with another Englishman, named Nathan Flint. They were both, in a sense, outlaws, and there seemed to be no secrets between them. They went West, and finally drifted to Piupetaw. There Twigg, *alias* Crook, married the daughter of a New England settler; and he wished to keep the secret of his true name and past life hidden from his wife. At intervals a letter would come from England, and as a precaution against discovery, he borrowed the name of his friend, Nathan Flint, for his English correspondence. The ruse succeeded; the few letters that came from abroad his wife thought were really for her husband’s friend, Flint, who lived all alone in a clearing some miles farther from the post than the Crooks.”

“The wretch; to go and deceive everybody like that—even his own wife!” broke in Priscilla.

And Mr. Digby Roy smiled faintly, preferring fire to water.

“Yes,” he said, “it was very mean of him. However, he is dead, twenty-two or three years ago; and his wife, also, has been dead many years.”

“And of course he had no children?”

“One child only—a lad, born twenty-eight years ago.”

“And died—”

“Alas, no! He is alive and well.”

“What, the true heir alive! Conrad Twigg’s son still living!” cried Priscilla, bounding to her feet.

“Yes; working in a quarry a few miles from Piupetaw. He was pointed out to me as the son of the Englishman, Harold Crook. Nay, nay, be brave! What is it—are you ill? God bless me, here’s a pickle!”

CHAPTER XIX.

OF THE FORELOCK OF FORTUNE.

PRISCILLA OLDCASTLE was in a dead faint. She just quietly sank down on to the floor all of a heap, and lay there as she would have done had she been dead. For some moments, indeed, Mr. Digby Roy really thought that she was dead; and so thinking, the situation struck him as being so ridiculous that he broke out laughing. He pictured Silas coming in, and Aunt Rebecca, and the situation seemed more ridiculous than ever, whereat he laughed again. Bending over the senseless form of Priscilla, he suddenly remembered stooping over another senseless form years and years ago—that of Francisca, Countess of Eden; and the contrast between the two women seemed to mount unto the very climax of the ridiculous, so that he laughed stronger than before.

Presently he began fumbling in the region of her heart, with a view to ascertaining whether any life was left in her or not. All at once she gave a deep sigh that almost startled him. She opened her eyes and looked round a little vacantly, then she sat up and sighed again deeply. Orientals manage to sit on the floor with a measure of dignity, and in the same position can, doubtless, sigh deeply without seeming absurd. To do the like, however, is not given to the ungraceful barbarians of the Occident.

It required an effort to keep his face straight, as Mr. Digby Roy inquired, in a voice perfectly attuned to sympathy, if she felt better. He assisted her to rise, placed a footstool under her feet, got out some wine and gave it to her, and seizing one of her most bulky and precious documents, opened it out, and holding it with both hands fanned her vigorously. He made breeze enough to turn a windmill. Her soft, little white curls, that lay in natural beauty about her temples, were blown hither and thither. Mr. Digby Roy, unused to violent exercise, was himself beginning to be blown. Into Priscilla's dreamy gray and brown eyes worked

the light of humor, and spread thence in a sweet smile over her chastened face.

"Thank you so much for your kindness. That is quite enough. Now please reach another glass, and help yourself to a little wine. I have been very foolish and weak, but I am better now."

He did as he was bidden.

"Yes," he said, playing with his glass on the table, "I think, if I were asked, I should say your conduct has been weak and foolish. Any simpleton can faint, and scream, and—"

"I don't think, I cannot believe I screamed—did I?"

"No, you did not scream. If you had, I should have taken my hat and stick and gone solemnly home. You sat on the floor, though, in the middle of the room, and sighed like a lover in a grove. What good has it all done you? Whereas, if you had kept your senses and your self-possession, you would have heard long ago what I am now about to tell you."

"Yes, tell me something to comfort me. The world seems very black to me just now. How I shall ever bring myself to tell Silas and Aunt Rebecca, I do not know," said Priscilla, and her voice went suddenly very shaky, and her lips quivered.

"Well, I should hope you will do nothing of the kind. What I have told you is a secret, and you promised to keep it."

Priscilla gave him a look of surprise.

"I do not think I understand you. How can I keep a thing like that secret?" she said.

"Oh, easy enough; by telling no one," answered he, smiling.

"But I must tell them."

"Why must you?"

"Why? Why, because we are ruined, ruined! Ah, you mock me, you mock me!" quavered Priscilla.

"I mock you! Heaven bless me, what will you say next, I wonder? I say you must keep your promise. You say you must break it. Naturally, I wish to know why you must break it. And all you say is, you must, and charge me with mocking you. Is that quite fair?" he said, in an injured tone.

"Are my wits befogged? I cannot see how I can avoid letting Silas and—and all the world, for the matter of that, know that the Twigg estate is no longer ours. Can you?" she said. And her voice was pitiful with entreaty, doubt, bewilderment. She was fallen headlong from the lofty pinnacle of self-confidence, of faith triumphant.

"Oh yes," responded Mr. Digby Roy, with a confidence that sent a thrill through Priscilla. Then he said, lowering his voice almost to a whisper, "Harold Crook's son—that is, Conrad Twigg's son—is in total ignorance of everything. Why should we enlighten him?"

"I don't see how that would benefit us. The estate would simply fall into Chancery, would it not?"

"It would, most certainly, were we such simpletons as to let it. Ask yourself, now, what would a quarryman do with the great Twigg estate if he had it? Probably drink and gamble it away in a few years."

"Yes, that is true. And, morally, seeing that the young man is a foreigner and no Englishman, morally, I feel that it belongs to me more than to him."

"I should feel the same, I am sure. And when one feels that morally a thing is so, it is one's duty to make the thing so."

"It is his legally, all the same," sighed Priscilla.

"Bah, a fig for legality when it clashes with morality. The Court of Equity, if it means anything, means the same thing."

"Perhaps if we applied to the Court of Equity—"

"My dear lady," broke in Mr. Digby Roy, "the Court of Equity is nothing but a wolf in sheep's clothing. It is as great a stickler for legality as any court in the land. No; we must find our own remedy."

"Remedy there is none that I can see."

"Well, of course, if you strike your flag at once, the fight is over. I should think that flying in the face of Providence. Think of it: all the lives that were really in the way, Providence has removed from your path in a most remarkable manner. That it has not gone to the trouble to brush aside Conrad Twigg's son is, morally speaking, very good proof that Providence left him altogether out of count, expecting you would be wise enough to do likewise. It would take a good deal to make me believe that Providence is ever in a hurry to provide English estates for Yankee quarrymen. On the face of it, the idea is absurd."

And Mr. Digby Roy spoke with so much unction and moral earnestness, modulating his tones in a manner so evangelically serious and assured, that Priscilla Oldcastle began really to wonder how she could ever have been wicked enough to think of doing such a dreadful thing as flying in the face of Providence. Said

we not that words are nothing compared with tones? Let him but master the current cant tones of religion, and your politician, your demagogue, your Queen's minister, shall teach without rebuke, aye, with great applause, any social heresy or humbug, any disloyalty or treason. The people who identify tones with gospel truth will back him to a man, and carry him into power. The Charlatan becomes the duly elected representative of the Simpletons. Delicious irony, hinting at the cool sanity that blows occasionally upon the hot brows of all of us poor mortal fools, missing none, and striking oblique wisdom from the silliest as the sun strikes beauty from the barren.

Said Priscilla, after a brief silence, "It is true nobody but ourselves knows anything about Harold Crook. Everybody supposes that Nathan Flint was Conrad Twigg. I suppose it would be possible to suppress Harold Crook altogether?"

"Nothing easier. Simply forget him. I almost regret saying a word to you about him. If I had kept silence you would never have been a penny the wiser."

"I wish you had," ejaculated Priscilla.

"Still I think I may say it was my duty to mention the matter to you. After all said and done, we cannot get over the fact that the quarryman is the true heir. To bury that secret in my own bosom would have been to practise an imposition upon you. I am sure you see that that would not have been right on my part."

"Certainly; I do not, I cannot, blame you. It would have been dishonorable of you. Yet, how it would have simplified matters!"

"Not at all. The estate is yours if you care to have it. Wealth or Poverty—you have the choice."

"Yes, yes. And in a sense it is actually ours. I have realized it. Others have realized it. To part with it now would be to actually give it away. And I have lived for it. Oh, it is hard, it is cruel!" cried Priscilla, wringing her hands.

"If I were in your case, I—"

"Yes," broke in Priscilla, eagerly, "what would you do, if you were in my position?"

"Well," answered Mr. Digby Roy, speaking slowly and impressively, "I think if you do not grasp the forelock of Fortune when it dangles within arm's-length, you will deserve to discover that, at the back, Fortune's head is bald."

CHAPTER XX.

OF A COTTAGE ON A COMMON.

SUPERCILIOUS folk might lift their eyebrows at the mention of Burnepost as a place of residence. Nevertheless, in the eyes of Mr. Digby Roy, the place had its advantages. It was a long way from Fellby; it was very retired; it was within easy reach of Abbeystead, which was within easy reach of town. These were some of its advantages, and perhaps the chief ones, in his judgment. For the rest, Burnepost had a little old church, a little old vicarage, and a little old inn known as the "Gorse Bush." Modestly, yet proudly, bravely, and faithfully it stood with its shoulder under the north side of the church, whose south side was supported by the shoulder of the vicarage.

Your modern Puritan, sour-souled as of old, may bark or hiss or spit at the situation of the "Gorse Bush," finding in it, or bringing to it, the suggestion of a mightily profane alliance. Which is a pity, seeing that for more generations than one has senses the little inn and the little church had stood amicably side by side, in something of the spirit of true social brotherhood, honorably true to each other, and setting forth an example of good-will and charity which it is far easier to sneer at than to imitate.

Nestling round about, as if lured by the threefold spirit of domesticity, sociality, and worship—things accounted more akin than alien in every true philosophy of life—were a baker's dozen of pleasant cottages, each with its own garden, with here and there an apple orchard or a small pasture. Most of the cottages had roofs of thatch, and windows of diamonded panes set in lead. The Old World air was about them: something of the mellow beauty of time; something of the deep moral charm of human life. They looked like homes, long time hallowed by the coming and the going of our kith and kin, by the being born and the dying, by the loving and the sorrowing of generations of men and

women and children. They bore, thank God, not the slightest resemblance to the cheap brick rows, vile and debased alike in design, material, and workmanship, which the great Mr. Millowner, or the great Mr. Manufacturer, builds to-day for his work-people—fit kennels for the folk, if it be true that they have no souls, and are only “hands;” proper breeding holes of social madness and political crime. But if with the sweet humanity of the old-time sea-going folk, we count them not as “hands” but as “souls,” these shoddy sordid structures of the great Mr. Millowner and the great Mr. Manufacturer are an abomination in the sight of God and man, notwithstanding that they are flanked with spick-and-span new churches and chapels, and will tolerate no place of “entertainment for man or beast” within a Sabbath-day’s journey of their deformity.

The glory of Burnepost was its common—not an ordinary common of about a hundred acres, surrounded with genteel villas aping the airs of country houses; nor yet a sombre slice cut from the black moorish gouty grounds of the moorlands, such as are often farther north; but a mighty expanse of rough grassland stretching beyond ken, bright all over with the golden gorse, with here and there big solitary oaks, and brakes of honeysuckle, the wild rose, and the tempting blackberry. There were pools frequented by wild ducks, there were humps and hollows innumerable, there were ancient sand-pits that had cunningly transformed themselves into warm, dry dingles, for the benefit of those true children of Nature, the dark-skinned gypsy folk, and sapient donkeys seeking a place of meditation and repose. It was a place as open as heaven itself, and as secret. Here one could roam for the hour in a solitude complete as a forest, and with the advantage of free air, open sky, and far vision.

One man may love rocks and hills and valleys; another man may love lakes, rivers, and woods, especially the pine-woods, with their clean, straight stems like marble columns, the ground clear of undergrowth and carpeted with long, fine grass, with their broken lights, their heavy shadows, their strange haunting vistas striking hard upon the seldom-hit sense of mystery, and peradventure touching and subduing the spirit with blended awe and affection at once ancestral and incomprehensible, yet none the less delicious. Yet another man may love the sweet pastures, the mown meadows, and the fields ploughed and sown and ready for

the reaper's sickle. But all such men, children of the soil, whatever may be their first love, would yield their second to the glorious common of Burnepost.

On the edge of this common, and within a couple of minutes' walk of the "Gorse Bush"—or should we have said, the church?—dwelt Mr. Digby Roy. His castle was a cottage with a thatched roof, latticed windows, and a porched door-way. It had no garden or orchard, and opened right on to the common. It faced south, and had a window to the east and another to the west. So that it seemed a thing full of eyes, grown because not unfrequently the glory of God was thrown full in its face and about its ears, from the other world that lay about the distant margins of the common. Its eyes were the only thing remarkable about this cottage, which a stranger would have looked at without seeing. It contained a tiny sitting-room, a tiny dining-room, and a tiny kitchen below, and the rooms above were as those below.

Now and then an impudent peddler or a free-and-easy beggar would open the door without knocking. The door opened directly into the sitting-room, and when the intruder's head was thrust without ceremony into the room, his eyes would open wide, and then his mouth. Usually he made no remark, for the reason that, before he could use his tongue for astonishment, a well-trained bull-dog had slipped through the open door, and taken a kindly hold of the intruder's calf. The head vanished in a flash, and a howl of pain was heard, with cries of rage or terror.

At such times Mr. Digby Roy would come forward, book in hand, pipe in mouth, and a pleasant smile on his face, while the faithful bull-dog would let go his hold, and place himself in front of his master, smiling as only dogs of his breed can smile. Then followed a brief conversation in thoroughly idiomatic English—the use of which is now entirely confined to reviewers—during which the master of the bull-dog decidedly held the whip-hand. Finally, the intruder slunk away, limping, to spread tales of wonder and terror concerning the cottage on the common. These tales had circulated through half of England among peddlers, tramps, and others of the same kidney.

While there was not much ground for these tales of wonder and terror, there was some. The bull-dog was a piece of clean, quivering, muscular truth, and every such piece, whether shaped in the sad similitude of dog or man, or in their mental analogons

of creed or philosophy, is to some men, everywhere and at all times, a proper thing of terror. Mr. Digby Roy, with his book, and his pipe, and his dark velvet smoking-jacket, and his idiomatic English — though he was not a reviewer — and his smile so pleasant, oh, so delightfully pleasant! as his glance rested first on the bull-dog and then on the bitten calf—the image of him never faded from the mind, but lived on clean cut, outlined against a background of wonder and terror. But that was not all.

When the intruding head opened wide its eyes and mouth, speechless with astonishment, it was not at Belcher, the bull-dog, nor yet at Belcher's master, the man with the etc., etc. Not once in a dozen times were these seen; but things more wonderful, more valuable, more curious. Expecting to see nothing more novel than a common day-laborer's living-room, with its clothless deal table, its brick floor, with a squalling child in one corner, and a blubbering child in another corner, and a sleeping child in another corner, and a playing child in another corner, and a couple of children under the table poking their fingers in each other's eyes, and twins at nurse sucking with the vigor of April lambs, while the dog lay on the wooden bench in the corner, and the cat nestled cosily against the warm loaves, not long from the oven, that lay cooling under the gaffer's arm-chair—the intruding head might well gape and stare at the dream of beauty and luxury that suddenly opened before it.

For the little room, though it had a brick floor and a monster beam right across that dropped a good six inches below the ceiling, was in truth transformed into a dream, a poem, an artistic creation in peculiar reds and perilous blues. The same taste, the same expenditure had been lavished on the little dining-room and the sleeping chambers overhead. The kitchen had little color, but was as near to godliness as exquisite cleanliness, brightness, and sweetness could place it. The maid-of-all-work and general house-keeper was a young woman of thirty or thereabouts, pretty, perfectly trained, discreet in conversation, using the latter word in a popular and not a Biblical sense, and herself in person an embodiment of her kitchen. Where did he pick her up? Ah, gentlemen and bachelors, would you not like to know, just?

In this cottage Mr. Digby Roy had lived nearly five years. Where was Janet Reed, his wife? The answer involves a reference to the preceding five years that lay between his coming to

the cottage on the common and his departure from Fellby. Looking at him now, as he stands at the front window watching, by the aid of a powerful field-glass, the movement of a female figure across the common, it seems almost cruel and ill-bred to raise the curtain of oblivion that has fallen between the present and the past so prettily, so quaintly, so artistically.

Presently the female figure on the common turns sharply to the left, moves along a little distance, and then suddenly disappears from view altogether, as if the earth had swallowed her up. Mr. Digby Roy puts down his glass, seizes his hat and stick, and goes out, locking the front door after him with a key that weighs about half an ounce, yet shooting a bolt that would defy the strength of a battering-ram and the skill of the expert lock-picker. Moreover, the redoubtable Belcher stays behind on guard. Let us follow the gentleman.

Across the common he strode for nearly half a mile, following no path, but winding in and out between the hillocks and the gorse-bushes, whose golden blossoms he switched with his stick. He walked quickly until at length he came across a narrow sandy cart-track, which he followed for some minutes. His pace moderated. He sauntered. Once or twice he stood still for a few seconds. May was still in, but June was at hand, and the wild bees, whose taste is exquisite, were droning their love-ditties, and pressing the yellow lips that were everywhere parted to receive them. Still, it was not the heat of the sun nor the fatigue of walking that caused the gentleman to saunter and linger on his way. He was thinking, that was all. He pulled from an inside waistcoat pocket a small flat case of gold, and pressing a spring it opened, and he took out a carefully folded cutting from a newspaper. It was a list of births, marriages, and deaths. Under the last head he read as follows:

“TUER.—*On the 18th inst., at the City Hospital, of inflammation of the lungs, Janet Reed, wife of Philip Tuer, of Fellby, England, aged twenty-six. The weary one is at rest.*”

At the foot of the cutting some one had written the name and date of issue of the paper. It was an American paper, and bore the name of a far Western city. Poor Janet! Or shall we say, Lucky Janet! Blessed Janet! *Aged twenty-six.* So she had been dead six or seven years.

But what about the three years that lay between her father's tragedy and her own supreme luck? Three years! My faith, I have known a young and happy woman smitten, smitten, smitten, and by sheer sorrow driven into raving madness in half that time. I have seen the coal-black hair of a vigorous man made white by woe in three months. Three years is an awful time for the unhappy—and Janet was unhappy. Not at first, though. She watched and tended her father until he was on his feet again, and then she left him. It was a fearful wrench, but she loved her husband and trusted him, and, being a loyal woman and wife, found no difficulty, though much pain, in scanning correctly the lines of her duty. The robbery of the jewels was bad enough; the terrible suspicion under which her father lay was far worse; worst of all, however, to her thinking, was the hate, as surprising as it was cruel and wicked, that had prompted her father to suspect and even accuse her husband. This was an unforgivable offence. "Let us go, husband mine. I am ready now," she said; and they went.

She could not drive the image of the old man, though, from her memory, no more than she could expel the love of him from her heart. In secret she wept oft when she remembered him. And Tuer seemed to have pulled himself together, and opened his eyes, and seen clearly the sterling qualities of his wife. His tender love and care of her bound her to him closer and closer, until at length she murmured to him, "Darling husband, I thank God now that we ever came to America."

This for nearly two years, and then—! Ah, me, it may be as fashionable to smile away the devil as it is to acknowledge with reservations the Deity. But does not life call for one as much as the other? Whence the mischief of life else? the light *diablerie* of thwart, cross-purpose, contrariety, and obliquity that crops up in every kind of circumstance? More! the tragical irony, the pitiless mockery, that rings like a devil's laugh, whence, if there be no devil?

It did not come like peal of thunder or flash of lightning. They had grown so close to each other. She adored him. One day a petty circumstance suggested an idea to her that touched her mind for a moment and vanished, as a bird rests for an instant on a twig and then is gone. Still the twig quivers when the bird has flown. From that day her happiness was dead. One by one

circumstance was linked to circumstance. Bit by bit the evidence grew and grew into damning proof. It took months to reveal itself, but at last the naked truth stood forth in all its horror. So her father after all was right. So her husband after all had done it. And she had learned to love him, oh, so passionately! oh, so foldly! Her former love seemed faint and colorless beside the strong, bright flame of the present. Therein lay the sting, the poison, the agony. Also, the tragical irony, the pitiless mockery. The world grew suddenly dark and hollow, with a confused noise in her ears shaping itself at intervals into the laughter of a devil.

She fell down in the street, one afternoon, insensible, and was carried to the public hospital hard by. He knew what had caused it. At the hospital they allowed him to take one look at her, that was all. This for a week. Then, he could see her, but—she refused to see him. He staggered like one struck hard. She refused him twice, thrice. Then he knew that he had lost, and what he had lost. Once upon a time her loss he would have been unable to distinguish from a gain, but since then she had sown love in his heart, and the magical seed, that takes so kindly to every description of human soil, had thriven exceedingly, and put forth blossom and fruit. And now she had gone from him forever. From the point of pure reason there was questionless an element of irony in the situation that lent to it a distinct intellectual piquancy and charm. The Great Dark Intellect of the Universe, named or unnamed, has a sense of humor, and must exercise it.

A month later her husband learned that Janet was dead. He was three hundred miles away when the paper reached him; it was five days old; the time was August, and the heat very great. She was already buried, beyond doubt. For twenty-four hours he sat in his darkened room, and neither ate nor drank; the righteous suffer, and the wicked also. He returned to the city of her death, got as far as the gates of the cemetery, then he turned away and fled the place, pursued, as he thought, by a band of grinning, threatening, jabbering demons.

Two years later Mr. Digby Roy and Belcher, the bull-dog, took possession of the cottage on the common.

CHAPTER XXI.

OF A TALK IN A GRAVEL-PIT.

LEAVING the sandy cart-track, Mr. Digby Roy followed what looked like a sheep-track, which presently dipped and ran, for about two hundred yards, between banks shoulder high. This gully, for such it was, showed dim marks of cart-wheels running sometimes, in the narrowest parts, nearly a foot up the banks. It was topped with gorse-bushes on both sides, and lined with short bilberry-bushes studded with crimson buds. At the end was another dip, which led down into an old gravel-pit, that was known to every gypsy roaming atwixt Thames and Tweed. Its sides were steep, high, and covered with long, fine grass; a thick hedge of gorse surrounded the top, and a couple of yew-trees, centuries old, one to the north and the other to the south, lent a solemn and respectable shade to the place. The south yew was haunted by a goblin owl, whose screech boded a wretched end for the hearer; while whoso walked nine times round the north yew backward and at midnight, would straightway hear the tolling of his death-bell. These were night charms. In common daylight there clung to them a certain clerical gravity and church-yard melancholy, that saved one from feeling utterly disreputable and vagabondish in this romany retreat. In a word, the yews spoiled it.

The bottom of the dene was clean grass, with one black fire-burnt spot, near which was a long, low stone, like a bench, with another stone smoothed and fitted for the back. Seated on this stone was Margaret Oldcastle, a book open on her lap, not reading, but scanning the strange land beyond the mountains, veiled in golden haze that rose and fell, opened and closed, through which came gleams of glory, glimpses of magic loveliness, and snatches of haunting melody, such as fill the young soul with deep, passionate, heart-sickening desire to enter the land of far distances, and live immortal in the land of love.

Very hungry was the girl for what she counted was the bread of angels. The dream was in her brain, the love was in her heart, the fire—called profane by fools, and by wise men sacred—ran in her young veins. She understood not a whit of the mystery, neither on the side of sense nor on the side of soul; for she was divinely ignorant and innocent, notwithstanding her “genteel” education. Aunt Rebecca had looked after that pretty closely; and Aunt Rebecca was not only an old maid, but a sweet, wise woman, who entertained a sweet, wise woman’s contempt and hatred of the latter-day system of education, that provides scant standing-room for divine ignorance in our girls, for divine mystery, for divine modesty.

Of a sudden the girl gave a slight start, seized her book, and listened. A blackbird flying low espied her, and cut across the hollow, screaming as if its tail were being pulled. As its notes of mocking fear died away a footstep on the springy turf of the gully was distinctly audible. The girl started to her feet, and gave a quick glance at the steep slope, as though meditating a retreat up the bank. The next moment she looked up, and there stood Mr. Digby Roy at the top of the path leading into the hollow.

“Well, well,” he cried, saluting her with great deference, “this is one of the happy surprises of life. May I come down, Miss Oldcastle?”

“Certainly, Mr. Roy. It is as free for you as for me,” answered Margaret, with a little more color than usual, and a little more light in her lovely brown-gray eyes.

“Please do not put it like that. I am not asserting a right. I am craving a privilege. If I had known you were . . . if you would rather I . . . may I, then? Now you make me happy.”

Hat in hand he descended, and as he took her hand the look in his blue eyes brought her eyelids down, while her color deepened.

“I have disturbed you, I fear. Won’t you sit down again?”

“I have been here some time. I was just going when I—”

“Ha! then I am an intruder, it seems. Forgive me.”

He backed, and bowed, and turned to depart. Instantly the girl seated herself on the stone bench.

“I am seated, you see, Mr. Roy,” she said, with a gracious smile and a frank look.

He came back, and without a word threw himself on the grass beside her, leaned on his elbow with his head on his hand, and

looked at her, while she picked up her book and read. Presently she glanced at him involuntarily, and their eyes met.

"Did you speak?" she said, with great simplicity.

"No, not a word," he answered, gravely.

"Oh," she intoned, beautifully, and her eyes returned to the book.

Still he looked at her. Her face delighted him, for it seemed to grow in exquisite refinement and loveliness the closer he looked at it; as is the case with flowers more often than faces. The curves of her upper lip, of her chin-line, of her nostrils were perfectly delicious. The delicateness of her ear, the daintiness of her eyebrows, the charm of . . . there, there, we know it all quite well. We, too, have looked on the face of the girl that was all beautiful, and—our memory is still good. So be it, and for the same, God be thanked. Only be it remembered—for there are such things as illusions among lovers—that Margaret had a face worth looking at, and Mr. Digby Roy knew what was what in facial beauty.

The turn of her neck and throat looked as if it might be worth drawing, but it was hidden by her jacket, as was likewise the curve and swell of her bosom; even her hands were concealed in gloves. He thought all this muffling up and veiling of simple natural beauty was an outrage upon Nature, a vile remnant of Oriental jealousy and lust. He saw with pleasure that her limbs were long, and he fell a-wondering that the Orientalists had not devised some cunning piece of barbarous fashion that would render impracticable any such immoral calculation as the length of a living human leg.

"Are you comfortable?"

"Yes, thank you, fairly so," she answered, without lifting her eyes from her book.

Another spell of silence, during which she thrust her feet out. He looked at them, and saw not a dainty pair of feet, but a rather clumsy pair of English walking-boots. He smiled a trifle scornfully, but the smile died away as he struck the argument of climate, which in every latitude is the popular scapegoat, made responsible for a host of things that are no more due to it than it is due to the moon.

"Do you come here often?"

"Frequently, in fine weather, if the gypsies are not here."

"What do you think of the gully up there?"

"I think it is an old cow walk."

"A cow walk! never. To me it is an idyll six hundred feet long and about four wide, a thing of sweet music and wild beauty," he said, quietly enough, but with a note of earnestness in his voice.

Then she looked at him, and he beheld surprise delicately but truly painted on her face.

"Ah," she said, "is it true, then, that you love the country?"

"Love the country? Why do you ask such a question?" he said, curious at her intonation.

"Because I should never have guessed it."

"Indeed. Why not?"

"You never seem to me quite a man of the country."

"What do I seem like, then?"

Just a slight, almost imperceptible shrug of her shoulders, and then, "You seem made for the city, the horrid city."

Once he had been cut sharply in the face with the light lash of a whip. He felt just the same smart and tingle now, so much so that he ran his hand over his face. He looked at her through half-closed eyelids for some moments.

Then he laughed lightly, as he answered, "Which goes to show, Miss Oldcastle, that the best people in the world are the most misunderstood. I cannot say I love the city, nor yet that I hate it. I can say that I love the country. My earliest memories are of the country. The golden days, the divine days, the days that are no more, they were all lived in the open, among grasses and trees and wild flowers, with black-faced rocks and bright-eyed streams. My prejudices, my sympathies, my affinities; all the good that is in me, and, by my soul, none of the evil, has its root in the soil. If I lost my love of the country, I should know that there was no hope for me, not in this world nor the world to come."

He spoke truly, and with a fulness and depth of meaning not to be caught by any stranger ear. Nevertheless, as she listened, the girl felt little thrills and quivers go through her, the effect, perhaps, of his mellow voice, or of his magnetic eyes, or of his suppressed emotion, or of these combined. If she was a pipe and he a player, of a truth never before had she been played on like this, by man or woman. She kept her eyes on the book and

said not a word. She felt sorry that she had set ajar the gate of conversation, through which he entered so subtly.

"Won't you talk with me a bit?" he asked, almost in a pleading tone.

With a tantalizing toss of her shapely head, she answered, "I came here to be quiet and to read. I am deep in a most delightful romance."

"So am I. Only mine is real, not imaginary."

"Then yours is only gilt, while mine is solid gold."

"You think so? Then you have never loved."

He watched the color rise softly to her face and die away. Then he added, "Love is the supreme romance, sucking the marrow out of all inferior romances, and reducing the highest poetry, as a vehicle of expression, to an impotent stutter."

"Then may the Fates save me from love!" she exclaimed.

"Which may Heaven forbid!" he cried in turn.

"A proud, imperious tyrant, who draws after him, like the setting sun, all the light and loveliness of life, leaving the world he has vanquished by his mighty charm a prey to coldness, darkness, and death."

"With this difference," he said, smiling, "love never sets."

Margaret clasped her hands, and raised her eyes devoutly skyward.

"Oh, what a fib! Why, Mr. Roy, if I had a wig and gown, and had your heart in the witness-box, properly sworn, I would show you whether or not love ever sets."

"But the court would exclude its evidence, Miss Oldcastle, on the ground of it being your own slave and vassal. Yes, it is true—I love you, Margaret."

Bareheaded, kneeling on one knee before her, he seized her hand as she attempted to rise.

Her face was aflame as she cried: "Oh, don't, don't! Please let me go. I—"

"Soon, soon, but not yet; not till I have said my say."

Then, as they both rose to their feet, he continued: "I did not, believe me, I did not mean to have said what I have yet awhile. But it leaped to my lips, and was out before I knew what I was saying. When the heart is full it is apt to overflow."

"It does not matter at all now. I quite forgive you," murmured Margaret, endeavoring to release her imprisoned hand.

"Nay, do not mistake me. If I have been too quick, too sudden, forgive me, please. But my love for you is not new or sudden-born; it is almost old. It sprang the first time I saw you, two years ago, in church. We were strangers then; we are not strangers now. Have you not seen and felt that I cared for you?"

"Yes, I have," she answered, truthfully.

"And you care for me a bit?"

"No, I do not."

"Oh, my God, don't say that, and in that tone! I cannot live without you, Margaret."

"And I could not live with you."

"Why do you think so?"

"I hardly know. I mean I am sure I could not put it into words without seeming, perhaps, rude, perhaps cruel. I do not wish to be or to seem either. Shall I say, Mr. Roy, your one defect in my eyes is that you do not resemble, do not even suggest, my ideal?"

"Yet I have blue eyes," he said, with a touch of mockery.

"Which I hate in a man," answered the girl, with a directness that killed the poison of the sting.

"Is not my beard sufficiently handsome?"

"It would be if it were iron-gray, like your hair."

"My nose, they used to tell me, was well-formed."

"Yes; I think it is too well-formed—too fine and delicate. A man's nose, like his mouth, should have more of strength than beauty. It is not your body, Mr. Roy, it is your soul that has no hint in it of my ideal."

He looked at her in amazement. Her self-possession, her insight, her exquisite frankness, had a charm that was utterly new to him. He loved her more and more.

"Are you sure you know the quality of my soul, then?" he asked.

"That is the point—I do not. I remember seeing in town one day two pieces of furniture. Both were very choice, very rich to look at. The one was covered with beautiful veneer, the other was nothing but bare, red, knotted cedar, polished, showing the native grains. To me your soul is like the first, while my ideal is like the second."

He looked at her in silence for some moments with a clouded brow. Then he said, bitterly: "Your ideal is a phantasm, a cre-

ation of your fancy. It stands for nothing that is compounded of flesh and blood, and nothing so compounded can stand beside it. You cannot marry an ideal. Will you throw me overboard for a dream? Is there not good solid wood with fine grain to be found below the coating of veneer? What you call veneer is mannerism. Artificial if you will, but necessary, and favored of the world. Not all men, nor women, can afford the costly luxury of your freedom and frankness, Margaret. But I am willing to strip myself of my social veneer—to be anything you wish me to be, if only—”

She interrupted him with: “No; you mistake me. I do not mean mannerism at all. I am not quite sure that I know what I do mean. I can only express it figuratively, and then you only knock my poor figures off their feet. My ideal is transparent. The light passes through its soul unobstructed.”

“Am I opaque, then?”

“To me, yes.”

“Dark and obscure, eh?”

“No, not dark. You catch the light and reflect it. You seem to me almost brilliant; but there is central darkness behind the brilliancy. You are not diaphanous.”

She knitted her smooth white brow as she spoke slowly and gravely, as one toiling at a problem.

“Ah, then you quarrel with my very nature. Yet it is not my nature. By trope and figure you might damn any man. Only give me hope, and I will build windows in my soul. Your very love would make me grow clear as crystal. It was for your sake, your sake alone, that I went to America. I thought only of you. I worked only for you.”

“I know it. For my mother’s sake, I am grateful to you. And if I could care for you ever so little, it would be a different thing. But I—oh, don’t, please, force me to say anything that sounds cruel.”

“Am I too late, then?”

“Too late? You mean do I—care for—”

“I mean have you given your heart to another, while I, blind fool, slumbered and slept?”

The color swept over her face as she replied, “No; it is simply—”

“Thank Heaven, there is hope, then. Margaret, I will wait—I

will wait, if need be, as Jacob waited for Rachel. Try and think kindly of me, for my happiness is in your keeping."

She moved as to depart, then facing round to him, she said, with a faint smile: "I am like mamma in some things, Mr. Roy. Like her, I have presentiments. And I shall never, I feel, be your wife."

He stood hat in hand and with a deep flush on his face, as she tripped gracefully up the winding path and entered the gully.

CHAPTER XXII.

OF GAFFER BUCKET ON THE TAIL-BOARD.

MR. DIGBY ROY folded his arms, and for some little while seemed to have dropped into a brown-study. At length he began to pace to and fro, and, with the true instinct of a lover, fell back for comfort upon soliloquy.

"She will never . . . how her eyes flashed as she said it! . . . never be my wife, eh? Well, I can . . . What a joke, though, if, after I have gone to the trouble of constructing their claim, she should refuse to . . . bah! I hold the screw . . . I turn it, and they squeal. . . . Sweet Margaret, if I did not love you . . . to bend her, to break her . . . especially that d——d ideal of hers . . . regular prig . . . cad . . . ass . . . to meet him alone . . . in the flesh . . . without gloves . . . just here . . . just now. Ye gods, 'twould make life itself sweet!"

He threw himself into a fighting attitude, and for some twenty seconds sparred in capital style with his idealistic enemy. He felt sure he had knocked him out of time completely, so that the bout did him no little good. As he put down his fists a peculiar sound, like a smothered guffaw, brought his heart into his mouth for a moment. He gave a quick glance in the direction whence he thought the sound came, and at the same instant, to his infinite relief, for he was very sensitive to the ridiculous, a pewit rose from the spot and with a startled cry went twitching overhead. Just then a whinchat, perched on a twig of furze, and, swaying gently, sang a most sweet song. When it had finished he continued his monologue:

“So much for the senses. . . . Trelawney did not know an orang-outang from a man. . . . I heard a clown’s laugh in a lap-wing’s call . . . she looks an angel . . . only hope angels may look like her . . . get on first-rate then . . . is she what she looks? . . . beastly analytical . . . a year of it would . . . murder or suicide . . . veneer . . . opaque . . . right? D—— it, yes . . . right on the head . . . hard . . . in a nutshell . . . like a book . . . Janet couldn’t read like . . . poor Janet! . . . she learned to read . . . she read it . . . horrible! . . . blood runs cold to think of it . . . if she hadn’t died . . . thank God, she died . . . I wonder if her father . . . no, that kind of weed dies hard. . . . Guess Francisca took . . . ah, Francisca, Francisca, divine Francisca! . . . if I only dare . . . what a joke to send them back . . . hideous scrawl chock-full of prison-chaplain sentiment for public perusal . . . penitent thief . . . ready for heaven, quite ready, in a hurry to go, forgive judge, jury, counsel for prosecution . . . superior to a sinful world . . . justice . . . glory, glory . . . punishment . . . I’m washed in . . . while people supposed to have the two rarest possessions in the world, to wit, common-sense and true religion, murmur devoutly, A Brand from the burning . . . funny this, if your stomach doesn’t heave . . . would she find out they are paste, I wonder? . . . give them to Margaret for a wedding present . . . eight thousand for stones alone . . . that’s eight years ago . . . eight hundred at bankers . . . deuced low . . . must put in to some port soon and refit, or founder I must . . . present style inexpensive enough . . . economy, economy, economy . . . salvation, salvation, salvation . . . nature is reasonable at odd times . . . if luxury were the salvation of the impecunious, why, the poor devils would all be damned . . . reasonable at odd times . . . eight hundred only left. . . . Enough? more than enough . . . I will contribute a tetramorph stained-glass window to the cathedral, with the superfluity . . . I am . . . yes, now, what am I? . . . hermit bachelor with bull-dog in a little gem of a cabin on the common . . . hard reader . . . harder smoker . . . devoted angler . . . hooked a pretty girl as house-keeper and—niece . . . no harm in a niece, good sir . . . made for celibates lay and clerical . . . enthusiastic lover of the country . . . fond of botany and, butcher reports, of beefsteaks, too . . . accustomed to mount a stallion of the Ukrain breed . . . fine breed that . . . Byronic breed . . . none in England

. . . therefore don't ride . . . contemplate setting up a camel, or fleet dromedary, with which to scour this sandy plain . . . a bit eccentric . . . a trifle heretical . . . charitable to the poor, barring gypsies and peddlers who are millionaires in disguise . . . proud towards the rich. . . . That's my local portrait to a hair, hung in what is politely called the mind of the natives, and thoroughly believed in as life-like and authentic . . . nature is reasonable at odd times . . . don't wonder George IV. believed he was at Waterloo, and headed his regiment in a charge down a steep hill . . . almost for believing at times that I am really and truly the gentle-hearted, white-souled, country-loving recluse that rustic fancy paints me. . . . Ah me! I wonder, do men like me ever . . . that d——d ideal, it will be one too many for me yet, if I do not mind."

It is always well to stop thinking when one's thoughts become troublesome, which is, perhaps, the reason why so many folk do so little thinking. The "ideal" seemed already one too many for Mr. Digby Roy, seeing that he sudden'y strode out of the gypsy hollow, and crossed the common, homeward, at a swinging pace.

Now, on the edge of the gravel-pit, and almost over the stone bench whereon Margaret had sat, there was a depression in the common wide enough and long enough for a man to lie in, between two flanking hillocks that served as screen from both wind and observation. At the top there was a little tump close to the edge of the gravel-pit, but hidden from below by a low clump of furze. The depression was warm, dry, lined with long yellow grass; the little tump, once an ant-hill, was soft and smooth, and seemed expressly made to pillow some wanderer's head. A sweeter couch on which to lie *sub dio*, gazing into the clear depths of heaven, or into the murky depths of one's own soul; listening to the lark, that little archangel of the air; or to the silly whining cries of the pewits, which nevertheless fill the ears of remembrance with the lapping of waves, the thunder of breaking surf, with the melody and the melancholy of the sea; or to the sweet droning of the far-travelled bee; or better still, to shut one's eyes and sink into dreamless sleep—a sweeter couch than that dry hollow, with its tump pillow and green hillock sides, was not to be found on Burnepost Common—that is to say, in England.

But if any one happened to be in the hollow below, saying his prayers, making love, or soliloquizing, it was a mistake, seeing

that any one chancing to be in the hollow above would be sure to hear what he said. For instance, Mr. Digby Roy had left the gypsy hollow perhaps a couple of minutes, when a head was raised from the little tump, and a couple of gray eyes peered cautiously first into the hollow and then away over the common. Then a man in a smock-frock rose to his feet, and, lo and behold ! it was none other than Gaffer Bucket.

Your common man is often busy enough with both hands and tongue, and does his fair share of the world's work ; but never by any chance does he do or say anything that may not be done or said by any other of his peers, without the world being any the wiser. Not so was it, however, with Adam Bucket. Precious little was it that he ever did or said, but little as it was, it bore, clear and distinct, the hall-mark of Adam Bucket. He was a proper man, had the divine gift of individuality, and impressed himself unmistakably upon his slender progeny of works and ways. Had he been married, his great-grandson might have been a great wit, or an original painter, or a mighty poet, or a wonderful general, or a brilliant financier, or a fine statesman, or an exceedingly accomplished rogue, or, in fact, anything that is something. Only, the wonderful Bucket of that day, with gilded staves, silver hoops, and ivory handle, would have clean forgotten its kinship with the Bucket that was christened Adam.

How Gaffer Bucket came to be within ear-shot of gypsy hollow is an illustration of the force of individuality that characterized him. When Margaret left The Pines her mother was out, and did not return for nearly half an hour. Priscilla inquired for Margaret, and the maid said she thought she was in the garden. Gaffer Bucket, piling wood in the kitchen, heard all this, but like a wise man minded his own business, which was to pile the wood he had chopped.

"Adam," said Priscilla, "I wish you would go and tell Miss Margaret that I want her."

"Yees, mum," said Bucket, and went out, got his cap and stick, and quietly trudged off towards Burnepost, in which direction he had seen Margaret go.

He was in no hurry to overtake the long-limbed maiden, if such a thing had been possible, not he. It was a day for killing time, a glorious day for killing time, and he was obeying orders : he was going to tell Miss Margaret that her mother wanted her. And

Bucket trudged along manfully, with a chuckle deep down that made his insides feel well, and which he would have kept there, out of sight and sound, for private delectation. But this he found to be impracticable. For no sooner did the image of the "Gorse Bush" inn rise above his mental horizon than straightway the chuckle swelled and mounted, and, scorning denial, came to the birth in a long, deep, slow-footed laugh that seemed to echo the native primeval humor of the race before liver was invented or dyspepsia came within the range of "practical politics."

A glorious old fellow was Gaffer Bucket, with not a trace of the thin, bright acrid deposit called cleverness, but with a broad, thick stratum of mellow wisdom, solidified and crystallized here and there into veritable genius. Over his tankard at the "Gorse Bush" he learned that Miss Margaret had gone across the common, which, to his thinking, was very much like going across the kingdom. To follow her was folly, seeing that she must needs return within eye-shot of the tavern; so going the distance of the flight of an arrow, he sat down with his back against a hump that was bright with scarlet bilberries, and gazed steadily across the common, and felt at peace with all men. Presently, just when his ideas were getting delightfully arsie-versie, and his rigid eyelids were descending a step at a time, a cuckoo lighted on a tree hard by and sounded its call to love. In the ears of Gaffer Bucket it sounded like a call to judgment, to up and off, to dig, to chop, to face Silas, or, worse still, Priscilla, or, worst of all, Rebecca. At that moment life was a burden, and he wished that the amorous bird might have a sore throat for the rest of the season, and find never a mate in the whole country-side. He was about to get onto his feet when he saw, some distance ahead, a figure which he had no difficulty in recognizing as that of Mr. Digby Roy.

"If the sparrer-hawk's on her track, the ring-dove isna t'other side of Lunnon, you may be sure," said Bucket, who could see a hole through a ladder as well as most men.

He watched Mr. Digby Roy until he suddenly disappeared in the gully, and then he set out after him. When he reached the gully his step became noiseless as a panther's, and by the time he got to the top of the path leading into the gravel-pit he had lost his erect position and was crawling along the ground like a huge serpent. It was just as he expected—the sparrow-hawk had fol-

lowed the ring-dove. He dare not watch them, and they were too far away for him to hear what they said; so he drew back, and made a circuit, and brought up right over the stone bench whereon sat Margaret, and there he laid himself down in the little hollow flanked by screening hillocks, with his head on the tump—the ruins of an ants' empire—and heard every word that was spoken below.

A peerie supercurious old varlet was Gaffer Bucket; nevertheless, he would certainly have gone fast asleep had not the fear of snoring kept him awake. When Margaret left he was about to follow her, but Mr. Digby Roy's broken soliloquy arrested him. He was not clear in his mind as to the propriety of his conduct, so long as Margaret was there; but now she was gone, it was a different thing altogether. He was no friend of the gentleman below; did not like him a bit; felt he needed watching, since he was a-hawking after their ring-dove.

"If I's sittin' on the tail-board o' th' cart, Mees Rebecce's on the shafts, wi' th' reins in her hands," he said within himself.

There it was in a nutshell. What Rebecca thought he thought, and with Rebecca at his back he was willing to face the whole world, and give it respectfully, but firmly and plainly, the lie.

"Her's no malice in her, but her's wit in her finger-nails, her has. Good as goud, but—saft! let him as thinks her saft try it on!"

This was woman-worship, the beautiful blindness, the sweet madness. It touched Adam Bucket with the splendor of chivalry, of poetry, of romance. Ah me, what his great-grandson missed by not getting born!

So this was how Gaffer Bucket came to be where he was. He watched Mr. Digby Roy until he was hidden by the inequalities of the ground; then he threw himself into a fine comic attitude and sparred with the air, though to tell the truth he suggested Mr. Digby Roy's performance less than that of a highly accomplished peripatetic bear. Panting and blowing, he ceased.

"Theer," he exclaimed aloud, "I've settled with him . . . what beats me is that 'hideel' . . . seems as how it wor a sort o' lover o' hern . . . anyhow he didna love him, not quite . . . hideel? happen it's the perlite twist o' the tongue . . . demme, it's a 'hidol' they mean . . . Efrum is joined to his hidols . . . that's Scriptor . . . I'm a-thinking the sparrer-hawk isna a Scriptor character . . .

that little boy has been to skule, I'm a-thinking . . . he's too familiar wi' women's names . . . jest like to ax him if his mother's name wor Francisca, an' his sister's Janet . . . if he said yees, I'd think th' better on him . . . that pastry thing now that he agoing to gie our Margie on her wedding-day . . . demme, to hear him talk 'ud mak' a mon think of jail for a fortnet arter . . . no, she wunna hev him . . . O-peek's the word, Miss Margie."

CHAPTER XXIII.

OF THE VALUE OF KIND WORDS, CORONETS, AND THE REST.

FOR a whole month Mr. Digby Roy did not put in an appearance at The Pines. Silas Oldcastle called on him several times, but never found him at home. He left word with his pretty house-keeper that he was "going bird's-nesting." He disappeared in the morning, and reappeared in the gloaming, with an appetite for dinner that would have merited the respect of an old-time alderman. Once he was absent for four days running, "watching the development of some young cuckoos," as he put it on his return.

At The Pines his conduct occasioned little comment and much thought. Gaffer Bucket would stop milking, and chuckle; would stand and scratch his head, and forget to pour the pigs' food down the stone spout into the trough, though the pigs were thrusting their fore-feet and snouts, with noisy gruntings and squealings, over the walls and door of the sty; he would sit on a log of wood, with the chopper in his hand, and chop not, shaking his wise poll, it almost seemed, as a child shakes its money-box to make sure that the coppers are really there. And this was the tune of his reflections:

"Demme if it binna nought else than Mees Margie's hideel. It's in his gizzard, sure, haugh, haugh! wus nor any croup. O-peek's the word, haugh, haugh, haugh!"

And Margaret, crossing by a road not quite so rough, reached the same mental goal. At first she had a strong sense of relief, and was not a little grateful to Mr. Digby Roy for his consider-

ateness in not pressing his suit; but as the days and weeks went by, his forbearance began to gradually assume in her eyes a less chivalrous aspect. She began to find an occasion for her hitherto useless stock of proverbial philosophy, and with such aphoristic pins and needles as "Only the Brave deserve the Fair," and "Faint Heart never won Fair Lady," and "Lightly lost lightly loved," she managed to scratch and puncture her self-love until it was inflamed and did bleed.

Naturally enough we feel that those who have been so indiscreet as to do us a great service, should do us a yet greater by ridding us of their presence as much as possible. This is only right and proper, seeing that gratitude is not native to man, but is a purely artificial sentiment, as exhausting to the human system as is a run of high fever. There was no mystery, no abnormality, no immorality, no lack of correct sentiment, then, in Priscilla Oldcastle's pleasure, amounting to gladness, when she found that Mr. Digby Roy realized the situation so accurately, and by his absence spared her system from depletion.

There were certain legal formalities to be observed before possession could be taken of the Twigg estate, and during the progress of these Priscilla's conscience was restless; by which we mean that she was a prey to hopes and fears, tightening and relaxing her hold on the "forelock of Fortune." This development of conscience, so-called, was so marked that if the luck had gone against her, and by any chance her claim had been disallowed, she would have identified the judgment of the court with the spontaneous action of her own mind, and would have credited to her sense of right what had been due solely to the power of law. When at length the oracle had spoken, and Priscilla found herself the acknowledged legal owner of the Twigg estate, her conscience, like a stout warrior after a hard fight, lay down without more ado, and went soundly asleep. If the courts were for her, who could be against her? Conscience had done its work, and was fairly entitled to repose; and resting on a golden pillow, its slumber is apt to be both deep and long.

But now in the brief spell of blissful quietude that preceded the hum and bustle of taking up their new residence and their new life, Priscilla's thoughts were refixed on Mr. Digby Roy, and she began to wonder at his long absence. She had a hundred things to tell him, and, above all, as he would make a very dan-

gerous enemy, she wished to assure him of her friendship and gratitude. So one night she wrote him a letter, a dainty, piquant, bewitching letter—for, like Horace Walpole, she excelled in the now lost art of letter-writing—enough to melt the heart of a—bird's-nester. It was despatched early next morning by Gaffer Bucket, who was fortunate enough to find Mr. Digby Roy at his breakfast. He begged to be excused that day and the following, but hoped to be at The Pines on the day after. The day came, and with it the truant gentleman. He found Priscilla sitting in an easy-chair in the orchard.

She gave him a very cordial greeting, and after some gentle reproaches on the one side, and some ingenious excuses on the other side, she said, "My husband and Margaret have gone this morning where do you think?"

"To Peakshire? To the estate?"

"Yes. They have gone to Abbot's Hey."

"Is that the name of the house?"

"Yes, and also of the village or hamlet that is on the estate. It is all settled, and we shall go there, I think, next week. Of course there is a great deal to be done before we move in, but it is better to be on the spot, and we shall stay at the home-farm."

"Ah, that's capital, capital! Possession is nine points of the law. May you live long to enjoy your good-fortune!" exclaimed Mr. Digby Roy, with warmth.

"Thank you so much. I knew you would be pleased," said Priscilla, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"Yes; I am pleased. One is always pleased to stumble on a justification of an old faith, especially when it has sunk to the level of a pious opinion, and is rapidly assuming the air of a superstition."

"Such as?" queried Priscilla, with pretty interest.

"A belief in the romantic element in life. I confess I had about given it up. Yet here it is in solid flesh and blood. I shall begin now to furbish my old beliefs which have grown dim with doubt, the dust of experience."

"Yes; I understand. It does seem almost like a dream. Yet how long have I dreamed it! I always had a presentiment that I had a natural right to property, somewhere or other."

"And that," said Mr. Digby Roy, with a smile that was not re-

flected in his grave tones, "that is the best kind of right. Better than any mere trumpery legal or moral right."

"Do you know," said Priscilla, falling into the same earnest tone, that lent something of a religious sanction to the sentiment, "I am surprised that I was ever so foolish as to doubt and hesitate. I have looked at it carefully all round, and the more I think about it the more I am convinced that I have done the right and proper thing."

At that moment Priscilla Oldcastle felt, not with the sinful pride of the worldling but with the self-conscious humility of the pietist, that she did merit a measure, a small measure, of the approval bestowed by gods and good men on conduct strenuously virtuous.

Responded Mr. Digby Roy, "Oh, unquestionably; and the pleasant thing, too. That should count for something with any reasonable mind."

"Yes," laughed Priscilla, softly, "it is pleasant, isn't it? After waiting so long and—and suffering so much. You will come and see us soon in our new home, will you not?"

"Why, of course I shall. With what pleasure shall I see my apples of gold in pictures of silver, especially in these days, when the nicest people are usually poor, so that to be rich is almost the same thing as to be vulgar."

"And yet—to be a poor woman is bad enough, but to be a poor man, ah! that is woe. Unless he is a brute or a boor without soul or mind, better, I think, Mr. Roy, better be an African slave than a poor man in England. The supreme efficacy of wealth is that it preserves you from the brutality of the poor, and from the vulgar, insolent, contempt of the rich."

"Oh, do not mistake me, please," cried Mr. Digby Roy, laughing. "I have a very great respect for riches, if not for rich people. Wealth is the true basis of all power, especially in a highly civilized and deeply Christian land."

"Oh, do you think so? Ought not character, virtue, learning, ability, breeding to be, rather, the basis of power?"

"Not all, my dear lady. In semi-civilized and heathen countries it might do, but never in a highly civilized and deeply Christian land. If these things gave a man influence or even secured for a man respect, why, there would soon be no influence or respect left worth having. For civilized Christian people the basis

of power should lie at once outside of civilization and Christianity. That is the charm of wealth. And being non-Christian and barbaric, lends a singular fascination to its power, and a peculiar piquancy to its insolent contempt. Thus kill we two birds with one stone: we taste the lusty joy of paganism and cultivate the chastened and wistful sorrow of Christianity. We worship barbarism, while we amuse ourselves with civilization. All of which means, my poor, patient, persecuted lady, that I shall contemplate the dear old hall, the noble park, the broad acres, the stretching woods, and the black rocks of Abbot's Hey, with the satisfaction inspired by the reflection that they belong to the dear, dear parents of my—my future wife!"

"What in the world do you mean?" cried Priscilla, laughing a little uneasily.

"Well, I know it is inconvenient, and therefore very ill-bred, to remind one of a promise. My affection must be my excuse. I think you gave me a promise before I went to the States?"

"About Margaret?" queried Priscilla.

"Yes. If I came back successful my reward was to be the hand of your matchless daughter."

"Do you love her?"

"What an amazing question to ask! Why do you ask?"

"Because I wish to know."

"What do people marry for, if not for love?"

"Do you mean that as a conundrum? Because if you do, I must give it up. You have not answered my question yet."

Mr. Digby Roy gave a slight shrug of his shoulders, as he answered, "Most certainly I love her enough to wish to make her my wife."

"Suppose you had come back from the States unsuccessful. Should you, in that case, have loved her enough to wish to make her your wife?"

It was impossible to take offence, for Priscilla's manner was bewitchingly soft and sweet and full of childlike simplicity. Still, her companion was a little unprepared for such exceeding directness. He felt strongly, just then, the charm of reserve, the conventional reserve that usually left certain subjects in the obscurity of indirect speech, like the dim lights in a cathedral. Priscilla's directness was as detestable in manners as broad, garish daylight was in worship—and Mr. Digby Roy was the recognized

parochial authority on the æsthetics of worship. These things passed through his mind in a flash, and the next moment he had somewhat sagely determined to meet Priscilla on her own free ground.

He laughed as he said, "Without careful consideration I could not give you a positive answer. If you wish it, I will undertake to give you a positive answer within seven days. Meanwhile, speaking impromptu, I should be inclined to say—No."

Priscilla fixed her gray-brown eyes upon him, with the mild, mysterious stare of a prophetess.

She murmured, "Which means—"

"Exactly. If I were in search of an angel the loveliest creature astray from Paradise would not satisfy me if I found, upon examination, that she had no wings. But this is only airy speculation. Your daughter has every attribute of the woman I could desire as wife."

"Have you spoken to her at all?" inquired Priscilla, a little dreamily.

"Yes, some weeks ago. I think she will require a little managing. She is inclined to be a bit restive."

"Indeed! What did she say?"

"Oh, she said a number of foolish things. Among others, that she could never be my wife. Like most young unmarried ladies, she has what she calls an ideal. It is a form of disease peculiar, I fancy, to the British Isles. Like chicken-pox, measles, and other juvenile complaints, they all take it, and they mostly survive it."

"But some die even of measles or what follows," put in Priscilla, with a gentle sigh.

"That is true. In that fact lurks the danger. Young ladies suffering from an attack of the 'ideal' need special treatment. I think your matchless daughter needs a little of your best attention, madam."

"I do not see what I can do. You will, I know, forgive my frankness. She seems to have taken a dislike to you."

"I am grieved to hear that. But she hardly knows me, you see. Might I ask if her mother has done her best to dispel the prejudice of the daughter?"

"I am afraid the mother has very little influence in the matter."

"Not so much as the aunt, perhaps, eh?"

"Margaret, I confess, thinks a great deal of Miss Oldcastle. Why do you not try and get in her books?"

"A sprat to catch a herring? I should make a poor courtier. Few folk are worth conciliating, and least of all those who gratuitously dislike one. A lady like Miss Oldcastle is to be respected fearfully, wonderfully, and at a distance, rather than admired."

"Yet she has had many great admirers, I believe, among the gentlemen."

"Still, not one with the courage of matrimony in his heart."

"There you are quite mistaken. But it is not right of me to talk about her like this. I am afraid if Margaret says she won't have you, that ends it," said Priscilla, with an exquisitely matter-of-course air.

For a moment or two Mr. Digby Roy surveyed her with a look of amused wonder; then with an ironical laugh he inquired, "Ends what?"

"Your chance of being engaged to her, of course," replied Priscilla, sweetly.

"Ho! ho! Well, I am not particular about that, so long as she—marries me."

"You funny, funny creature, what do you mean?" cried Priscilla, whose piquant, vivacious manner was perfectly delightful when it was not diabolically irritating. Just now, though it somewhat irritated him, Mr Digby Roy was strong and brave enough to recognize its charm.

"I mean," he said, "if she prefers to dispense with an engagement, I have no objection. Or if an engagement is absolutely necessary, let it stand over till the day before the wedding. Only, in that case, the sooner the wedding comes off the better. Disengaged young ladies with a prejudice and an ideal are hardly safe until matrimonially bridled and saddled."

"It is cruel of you to talk like that, Mr. Roy. The poor child is too young to be married yet. She is barely nineteen."

"It is never too early to pluck ripe fruit, my dear lady."

A faint blush looked very pretty on Priscilla's face.

"Then, as you say, you are almost strangers," she said.

"That is nothing. Intimacy may be of rapid growth, given the right conditions."

"But what can I say or do? She does not like you, and you say yourself she has told you she will not be your wife. Would you have me force her against her will?"

Mr. Digby Roy shrugged his shoulders again, and his answer was perfect. In words he merely said, "Not for the whole world. Nevertheless, I should have thought it a parent's prerogative to advise, to persuade, and even to command. Compulsion by brute force is barbarous. But compulsion by moral force—if that is barbarous, then are we all barbarians in Christendom."

"I am afraid my conscience would not allow me to do it. Besides, is it quite fair to Margaret to press your suit just now?"

"Why 'just now'?"

"Think of her position, her altered position."

"You mean she will now be a county lady, and with her beauty, the county belle, eh?" said Mr. Digby Roy, and his voice seemed suddenly to cut.

Priscilla smiled and nodded.

"Also, with her wealth, as your heiress, a county prize?"

Again Priscilla smiled and nodded.

"And girls, you know," she said, "in these days are very ambitious. The sparkle of the coronet still shows through all the clouds of democratic dust; and what lures the eye is very apt to win the fancy. Is it not so?"

"Beyond a doubt. Yet, your promise apart, have I established no claim to your consideration? If kind words are more than coronets, what are kind deeds?"

Said Priscilla, with an earnestness as beautiful as it was sincere, "I never in my life said that kind words are more than coronets—never."

"But our poet has said so," observed Mr. Digby Roy, irritated at his own quick sense of humor, which even at this solemn moment sought relief in laughter.

"Well, Mr. Roy, you are just too—too verdant for anything. I do not borrow my opinions from any poet, big or little. If I wished to talk cant, I might go a-borrowing. But I say that a coronet in the family would be worth more than all the kind words spoken in London itself, aye, in England, in a whole year, put together."

And our lady of fancy looked so gravely sweet, and sounded so

prettily enthusiastic, so morally earnest, that none but a dim-eyed pedant could doubt the fine quality of her sentiment.

"Do you put the same value upon kind deeds?" asked Mr. Digby Roy, with some causticity.

"I try to value a kind action on its merits. In doing so, I take notice of motives. I find a few pure, and a great many mixed. Many kind actions spring from what I call piebald motives," explained Priscilla, with the air of a moral philosopher.

Mr. Digby Roy gave a laugh, sardonic in the older sense. He liked not the argument a bit. It was like a saw working its way through an undersetting of timber.

"Am I to make a personal application of your scientific method of appraising kind actions?" he asked.

"How do you mean?" inquired Priscilla, with quick, open-eyed innocence.

"Well, I am free to confess that when I went out West, and did what I did for you, I was working for a reward. My action was, I think, sufficiently kind as regards you. But my motives, nevertheless, were decidedly piebald. You yourself had offered me—bribed me with, if you will—my wage. Do you now say that, as a hireling, I am unworthy of my hire?"

"You dear, foolish man, don't be ridiculous. You know that I can never repay you for your kind services. Some day, perhaps, you will know that I am not ungrateful."

"I wish no reward other than my—my hire. With that I am content. With less, I should feel I owed you an apology for plunging you so irrecoverably in my debt," said Mr. Digby Roy, in tones that Francisca, Countess of Eden, would have remembered with a shudder. Even Priscilla looked exceeding grave, as for a moment the thin filaments of illusion that seemed ever to enmesh her wits were withdrawn, and reality stared in upon her with eyes dark and threatening.

"I must talk with my husband about it," she said, in a low voice, closing her eyes involuntarily upon a system of things which, for the moment, had singularly clear and painful outlines.

"Then we will let it rest there at present. On reflection I am sure you will feel that it is only right and honorable to pay just debts—if they are recoverable by force," said Mr. Digby Roy, with a smile, sardonic in the newer sense.

Two minutes later he took his leave. His walk home was a

thoughtful one. Outside his cottage door he stood a while twirling his door-key. When he thrust it into the lock, he murmured, *sub auditum*, "A woman without conscience and without imagination!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF THE IRON POT THAT WAS GOLD.

OLD Major Twigg, the last life-tenant, had lived very quietly at Abbot's Hey. His chief endeavor, more natural than laudable, was to get as much out of the estate as possible. He did not so much starve as bleed it. He never cut down a tree without planting another; but he felled mercilessly. The mansion was as picturesque as it was ancient, but he would spend no money on it, and so it got sadly out of repair. Silas set men upon it by the dozen, and they ought to have finished the job in three months; but the men were so in love with their work that they were slow to finish it, and stayed lovingly and lazily on for another two months.

How much longer they would have played at working but for Rebecca it is hard to say. She suggested that they should get their wives and families down, and settle in the place for good. She made several other suggestions equally apposite. She began to keep a sharp eye upon them. Now and then she fastened on a man, and complimented him on the skill with which he kept himself busy doing nothing. She did this with such caustic humor as to evoke the fearful placating laughter of the rest. Very soon she became to them a terrible creature with a will, and ideas, and a tongue, and a manner, and a courage, all her own. She dominated their imagination, and the thing was done. Thenceforward they worked as busily as elves, and almost with as beautiful a craft; for to scamp their work they were now afraid. So by Christmas the Oldcastles were in their new and splendid home, and the big Yule-logs threw a ruddy glow onto the panelled walls of the spacious dining-room, dark with age. And Priscilla looked and felt like a duchess: at last she was in her element. Mr. Digby Roy did not get down to see them until the middle of

March, and then he stayed only a couple of days. He spent most of the time out-of-doors, going over the property with Silas.

Voe, Poloc, and Abbot's Hey form the angles of an equilateral triangle, of which Abbot's Hey is the apex, while Voe and Poloc lie along the base-line of the classic Scarthin. Hence, as the reader knows, it goes without saying that Abbot's Hey was sacred to such beauty as lies in wooded hills, in hanging pastures, in grim, fantastic rocks, in wild, sweet dales and dells with passionate brooks, in rich valley-lands, in the strong, dark arms, here and there out-thrust, of the great body of moorland beyond. Mr. Digby Roy professed himself in love with the land, and that was the only word of love he uttered during his brief visit. When he got back home, and thought the matter seriously over, he concluded that as the master of Abbot's Hey, with a rent-roll of four or five thousand a year, he would be able to live decently, and, perhaps, get a little pleasure out of life. Silas was good for—as long as apoplexy did not hit him. Priscilla? Oh, she was good for a hundred years; any one could see that. Every month found her a year younger.

“Barring her hair, she looks a ripe, delicious forty. If Old-castle should kick the bucket, she would marry an impecunious lord within a year, just to be called ‘My lady.’ That would never, never do. She must live with us, and I will manage her affairs for her. We must cultivate the acquaintance of titled dowagers of great pride and little pelf. She will find peace of soul and joy of heart in their select society. Ah, if she would only make up her mind to go home of a sudden and soon, what a lovely white marble obelisk I would erect to her memory! Meanwhile, I verily believe she thinks she has cured me of my vaulting ambition—has politely put the extinguisher upon me. *Voilà, une dame sans conscience et sans imagination.* Well, I must supply her with a little of both, I suppose.”

In a word, his flying visit furnished him with an ever fresh and pleasant subject of thought. It was like a meaty, juicy bone to a dog not famished but idle. He took it with him on his daily walks; held it while he ate, smoked, read, and slept. One has to live in the country to find out the value, the flavor, the divine essence, the secret nutritive qualities, of a meaty, juicy bone of thought. Your City clubs and restaurants yield no hint of the blessed virtue that lurketh in a single good bone,

He had promised that he would run down again, and make a longer stay, before long; and he meant to keep his promise, if for no other reason than that Priscilla had shown more formality in her invitation than sincerity. He thought it was time, now, to have a clear understanding with her, and he made up his mind to press his suit to the end during his coming visit. It was twelve months now since his return from Piupetaw, and during all that time Priscilla had treated him not as the arbiter of her affairs, but as a mere stepping-stone to fortune. Taking the simple facts of the case as they stood, her conduct amazed him. He could find no satisfactory clew to her enigmatic behavior. That she contemned his power, that she despised his enmity, seemed incredible. Did she consider him insensitive to neglect and ingratitude? Did she credit him with an exaggerated sense of honor, that was superior to treachery as it was incapable of revenge? The attribution of idealistic excellence is flattering to the vanity of even low moral natures, and most of us are ready to accept as truth what, to the rest of the world, is rank flattery. But, on the other hand, the highest moral natures love not the virtue that is thrust upon them as a strait-jacket, to disable them for resistance. Mr. Digby Roy smiled grimly as he told himself that Mistress Priscilla Oldcastle would live to learn that he was crippled by no superhuman excellence, and was rendered contemptible by no angelic virtue.

“No, no; I leave the Ideal to her daughter. Two in a family would form a paradise, the breeding-ground of serpents.”

The idea was so humiliating, so irritating, that he thrust it from him, and finally rested on the plain and simple theory that Priscilla's enigmatic and amazing conduct was entirely due to her characteristic inability to distinguish reality from illusion. She lived in a world of her own, and the light of it was reflected in her mystic eyes—a world in which all straight lines were curved, and all acute angles were rounded, and all asperities were smooth, soft, and fluent, as the tide-ripples on the shallow sand. Poetic in temperament, she was fatalistic in philosophy and egotistic in religion.

“Ah, Madame Sans-Sans, you must be taught true religion, true philosophy, and by me. How to instil a little conscience, how to insinuate a little imagination into a consciousness untainted with the smallest atom of them? A problem, by the uni-

verse, a problem! Yet if what wise men say be true, and all our massive, ornate, and splendid architecture of ethics is superimposed upon a foundation of stark, shuddering animal fear, the problem is solved. Madame Sans-Sans, you have the soil, and I will supply the seed. And the harvest to the reaper."

This reflection tended to smooth the ruffled plumage of Mr. Digby Roy's self-esteem. He made it one bright-eyed morning in May, seated at his breakfast-table, as he broke a boiled egg on delicately cut and cooked rashers of Wiltshire smoked bacon. The white was set, and the yolk was in a thick, glutinous condition—that is to say, the egg was cooked to perfection.

"Beautifully done . . . laid this morning . . . boiled exactly five minutes and twenty seconds . . . broken thirty seconds later . . . egg-glasses are made to run only three minutes . . . either eggs take longer to boil nowadays . . . people do not know how to cook an egg . . . manufacturers of egg-glasses are donkeys . . . which?"

Just then his glance fell upon a bottle containing sauce made—delightful touch of Old World quaintness—"from the recipe of a nobleman in the country." The stopper was glass, with a sheath or ring of cork upon it. When the stopper was removed, it always left the cork ring sticking in the bottle: an exquisite contrivance of awkwardness, unsightliness, and what of waste and uncleanness arose from the impossibility of pouring out the fluid, without any of it trickling down on the outside.

"Beyond doubt to be a manufacturer is not a sufficient proof that one is not a donkey. . . . I will patent an egg-glass for the modern egg . . . sauce-bottle, too, with sensible neck, and stopper not entirely futile . . . merit a pension from the Government . . . win gratitude of millions . . . little invention evidently dangerous thing . . . manufacturers shy of it . . . include it among the 'strangers' not allowed on the works."

The window was open.

"Put them on the window-sill. Good-morning, postman. On mornings like this I envy you, the bearer of anonymous checks for the good, of dunning letters for the wicked, of sweets unmentionable for Perigot of the plough and Amoret of the dairy. Hail, messenger of the gods, and tarry not, I beseech you."

"Good-morning; fine morning, sir. I says, where there's honey there's stinging bees. Folks greet me with bright eyes, and send

me on with dark faces. Many sighs and few laughs is the rule, sir, and good-day, sir."

Mr. Digby Roy's good-nature was illimitable, though his interest in *M'sieur le facteur* was meagre. For that worthy man of the bent shoulders and the broad feet, with half a dozen private bags hung round his neck, and his pockets at the side bulged out with letters, and who was a terrible Radical for the sole, and perhaps sufficient, reason that Government supplied him with an overcoat that would turn no water, was as heavy as lead, shrank when wetted until the sleeve-cuffs encircled his elbows, and was, in short, a mockery, a delusion, and a snare — brought for Mr. Digby Roy a mail usually the most commonplace in the parish. It was a mail that held no hope and no fear, no pain and no pleasure.

"Steer clear of debts and friends, then you need have no fear of an enemy, nor quail when the postman cometh."

He did his best to live up to the spirit of his maxim. It was with a languid interest, therefore, that he rose and fetched his mail from the window-sill. It consisted of a monthly magazine, a weekly journal, and a daily paper, together with a couple of letters. One of these letters seemed to interest him, not from its contents, for he had not yet opened it, but from its postmark, which was Abbeystead.

"Don't know the handwriting a bit."

He turned it over, and saw across the fastening a printed direction that was obscured by pen marks.

"What the dickens is it . . . what's that . . . *If — — Liver — — turn — — heaven pays . . .* that's odd . . . poor devil with liver pays, one would think . . . try again . . . *gone — come — ass . . .* regular riddle . . . glad he, she, it had wit enough to cross it out . . . had up for receiving indecent matter through the post."

He went on vigorously with his breakfast for some minutes, meanwhile eying the envelope as it had been a savage dog asleep.

"Yes, that's it," he suddenly ejaculated, seizing the envelope and scanning it closely.

If not delivered, please return in seven days to— "To . . . *L . . . go . . .* no, it's no go . . . find out inside."

He tore open the envelope, and revealed what seemed to be a closely-written letter. He shook his head, and turned to the

signature. It stood out almost like a challenge, clear, bold, proud.

CORNELIUS CROOK COWP.

“Good God! is it possible? And at the ‘Peahen!’”

Mr. Digby Roy had had quite enough breakfast. Coffee and toast untasted, he left the table, thrust the letter unread into his pocket, and in half a minute was striding across the common, seeking the privacy of its wide solitude. In the light shadow cast by the young, dainty foliage of a silver birch he sat down and pulled out his unread letter. His face was hard set. He looked in a fighting mood.

“Oddest thing on earth . . . what can he . . . he cannot have found out that . . . go over to the other side . . . bah . . . serve her right . . . cut off nose to spite face . . . unexpected always happens . . . no . . . no . . . he can know nothing . . . use him . . . d—— it all . . . here goes.”

This is what he read:

“THE ‘PEAHEN,’ ABBEYSTEAD.

“MY DEAR SIR,—On my way east from the Pacific coast last January I had occasion to visit Piupetaw, Wyoming Territory. I learned that you had been there, some months earlier, on a legal errand, collecting evidence relating to an old friend of my father, by name, Nathan Flint. I gathered that it was in connection with some question of property over here. I understand that incidentally you also made some inquiries concerning my father, Harold Crook, and his family, which was very natural, seeing that my father and Nathan Flint were close friends from the date of their going out West. I have no doubt that I will be able to give you some information on the subject that might serve your purpose. As you left your name and address behind you, I thought I would call upon you when I came to England, which I purposed doing some months ago. The people here tell me that you are at home, and if it is agreeable to you I will give myself the pleasure of calling upon you to-morrow about noon. In any case, and if I cannot see you to-morrow, I shall enjoy the walk which I understand is under three miles, and very pleasant. So please do not allow my coming to interfere with any previous engagement. Believe me, my dear sir, yours most truly,

“CORNELIUS CROOK COWP.

“DIGBY ROY, Esq.”

Such was the letter, and Mr. Digby Roy read it over three times. Then he felt sure that he knew it, and had missed nothing. Everything has its own peculiar odor, letters not excepted. Only the odor of a letter is something vital, being nothing less than an exhalation from the spirit of its writer. It rises from the sheet like a distinct perfume, and its essence is spiritual. What it says when first inhaled is truth undisguisable and unadulterate. But it is dissipated almost instantly, and the second and third sniff will yield nothing to the interior sense. Thenceforward one must depend for intelligence on words, grammar, expressed sentiments, personal judgment, and prejudice—that is to say, on good-luck which, like as not, is bad-luck.

Mr. Digby Roy had sniffed the odor of the letter, and liked it. It was that of sweet candor and gentle honesty. In general it would have been enough for him, but the occasion being exceptional he must needs, man-like, distrust the finer instruments of knowledge for the grosser. So he read and reread, and chewed the cud of reflection, and set memory on the whirr like a loom, and weighed and measured and counted, and worked the treadmill of his mind as gravely and bravely as though he had really been grinding good corn, instead of churning empty air.

“No, there is nothing below it . . . honest as daylight. . . . What a drama to hold in one’s hand! . . . Wonder what he’s like? . . . probably a vulgar Yank.”

Here he pulled out a note-book and read as follows: “Piupe-taw. C. C. C., son and heir of C. T., *alias* H. C., lives somewhere at Cape Cod, aged about eight-and-twenty, assumed name of Cowp, his uncle’s (?), business unknown, said to be rich, married or single unknown, not been here for some years.”

He turned over several pages, and came to another entry: “Boston. Yesterday to Cape Cod after C. C. C., away from home, not back for a week, in Adirondacks, residence tip-top, regular swell, fine estate, blazoned by rumor a millionaire, inherited from uncle (mother’s brother), unmarried.”

Mr. Digby Roy put away his note-book and consulted his pipe. It was very sweet, very sweet indeed. When the brute you backed heavily, like a fool, has gone and won; when the dear creature has said Yes, instead of the proper No; when you find yourself remembered and not forgotten, for the yacht and the moors—on these and similar occasions a briar-root is apt to be very sweet, very

sweet indeed. Mr. Digby Roy knew how well these mental flavors blended with the weed, but he was now tasting, he thought, the finest blend of all. He was master of a situation that would have hit the jaded palate of a little *blasé* god, whose interest in human affairs had grown what some provincials would call "stale and haughty."

"Working in a quarry just outside Piupetaw! . . . poor devil of a day laborer! . . . pointed out to me as son of Englishman . . . that's true enough . . . but as son of Harold Crook! Ha, ha, ha, what a joke! . . . best of all, impromptu . . . stroke of genius, sir. . . . Oh, Madame Sans-Sans, Madame Sans-Sans, if you only had the sense of humor! . . . no more than a whale . . . entertains no fear of the poor, illiterate quarryman . . . Yankee quarryman run away with her estate? His? Right he should have it? . . . Why didn't Heaven grant him, then, a presentiment? . . . A worm, my lady, a worm in the middle of the road, my lady. . . . Draw up for a worm? Idiot! Drive on, coachman. . . . Whoever heard of such a thing? . . . Worms are made to be driven over . . . get in the middle of the road on purpose . . . like it, in fact . . . hey, *presto*, Quarryman, a millionaire! . . . Stop, coachman, stop. How dare you make such a dust! That gentleman a couple of fields away might wish to cross the road, and dust, you know, floats a long time in the air, and is not pleasant . . . luxury of a genuine conscience beyond her . . . cannot afford it . . . never will . . . well, she must try the cheap Brummegeg article, compounded of superstition and terror . . . fig-leaf better than nothing. . . . All the same, I wish he were not at the 'Peahen' . . . far better at the devil."

CHAPTER XXV.

OF A GENTLEMAN FROM CAPE COD.

PROMPTLY at twelve o'clock Mr. Cornelius Crook Cowp raised the lion's head knocker on the door of the cottage on the common. It fell from his hand as the door unexpectedly opened, and a gentleman appeared, with a book in his hand, a long-stemmed pipe in his mouth, and at his heels a magnificent bull-dog, which surveyed the new-comer with the impudent stare of a true footman.

"Am I right, sir—Mr. Digby Roy?"

"Yes. Mr. Cowp, I presume?"

"I am, sir. I hope you will forgive me for—"

"You are very welcome. Come inside. I keep bachelor's hall, you know. How did you find the way?"

"Oh, without the least difficulty, thank you."

"My place is such a nutshell, you see, that people unused to nutting can hardly see it when it's under their nose," said Mr. Digby Roy, closing the door, and moving a chair for his visitor.

The latter stood for some moments, and his eyes ran over the room deliberately and critically.

Then, as he seated himself, he said, "You call it a nutshell, do you? A shell, sir, if you will, but of no nut. Rather, one of those rare sea-shells of exquisite loveliness within, and filled with sleeping music."

Mr. Digby Roy gave a soft, mellow laugh.

"That's very well put. Do you write poetry, may I ask?"

This time it was Cowp that laughed, and there was a frank, hearty ring in his laugh. Indeed, the laughter of the two men was, in its way, very characteristic. The one soft, mellow, cultivated, and artificial. The other not uncultivated, not unmelodious, but native, spontaneous, and artless.

"No, on my honor, no. I have many faults; I tolerate, perhaps even cultivate, a few prejudices; but I limit strictly my vices. I have never been guilty of poetry."

"Do you smoke?"

"Certainly. I count that almost as remote from vice as virtue."

"A cigar?"

"If you wish."

"A pipe?"

"I prefer."

"Good. But in that you are more English than American, I fancy," remarked Mr. Digby Roy, passing tobacco and a selection of pipes.

"Yes, that is true. Still, it is but a fraction of my conduct, and—I think I am loyal."

Mr. Cornelius Crook Cowp stood six feet in his stockings, and he was built proportionately. He had the reputation of being the best fencer in New England, and as a boxer he had won the re-

spect of certain professional gentlemen, who considered nothing truly respectable outside proficiency in their art. At Harvard he was captain of the base-ball team, and was pointed out as a man guilty of knowing more and better Greek than Homer. These were his weaknesses. He had, however, some strong points, of which any man might have been legitimately proud. He knew how to dress well, and did it. He had a long, clean-cut, handsome face, with a heavy mustache. He had a military carriage, and an address with ladies so polished and chivalrous that they adored him. He was rich, he was young, he was a bachelor. Strong points these, all of them. For did they not show the quality of the man? his moral character? his spiritual fibre? Could any mother desire a nobler kind of son-in-law?

For the rest, he was exceedingly amiable, and though his will was not as strong as his muscle, in spite of many facilities and importunities to become soiled, he had kept his soul clean. He had no forwardness, no loudness, none of the impudence of the democrat, and none of the insolence of the plutocrat. He was well-bred, well-mannered, and perfectly self-possessed. The Americanisms of his speech were not of the vulgar, barbarous, and outlandish kind. At the worst, they represented the monotony and want of flexibility involved in the frequent repetition of the same words and phrases; while, at the best, they were survivals of old English—the decayed gentlemen of our speech.

There is nothing in America corresponding to what we English mean by a cultivated voice: a cultivated tone of voice would be killed by the ridicule of the pavement and the press. This antipathy, this brutal scorn of melodious intonation is, however, as much English as American. We, from of old, have erected social barriers against this popular contempt, and thus have been able to ignore it; though how much longer we shall be able to do so is another question. America has but few of those social barriers, and those weak. But they are growing as surely and as steadfastly as coral reefs; and it is quite within the possible that when Old England is washed from end to end with waves of democratic speech, rude, crude, harsh, and unmelodious, New England will be the native home and training-school of the only English-speaking voice of noble culture and exquisite melody. In that day the poor, unfortunate, overladen scapegoat Climate will have gone into the wilderness, and will be heard of no more.

Cowp's voice, though it owed nothing to training, was full and pleasant. He was a gentleman. Mr. Digby Roy, whose discrimination was nice, recognized the fact in a moment. His home was the best on the Cape. It was large, and luxuriously appointed. His stables were full of fast trotters and English hunters; and so confirmed was his hospitality, and so numerous his friends, that he mounted eight or ten saddle-horses daily. Behind him stretched twenty miles of forest, the home of the wild deer; in front was the Sound, with Comfort Haven within gunshot, affording sheltered anchorage for his schooner-rigged yacht, all white and gold.

There are not many whalers nowadays on the Cape, but when Cowp first went there as a lad of five whaling was a great trade. Old Elijah Cowp was a childless widower, and he agreed to adopt little Cornelius Crook, his sister's child, on condition that his parents renounced all control over him, and allowed him to assume his uncle's surname, which was done. Elijah Cowp had made his pile as a whaler; he had a regular fleet of boats, and was the great man of the trade. The Cape Codders were mighty proud of him. He had shrewd wit and genial humor, the native characteristics of the old whalers of the Cape. He was no skin-flint, but he could close his fist as tight as any man on occasion, and for driving a bargain he might have been born in Yorkshire.

I know not why, but your sea-dog turned landsman is pretty sure to hanker after a farm, perhaps because it suggests shipwreck. The ambition of every whaler on the Cape was to make money, buy a farm, with some cranberry bogs, and spend his declining days with one eye on his ripening Indian-corn and winter squash, and the other on the glancing waters of the Sound, with its islands and its lighthouses and its many white-winged craft. Elijah Cowp, also, had this last infirmity of noble minds, and something more. When he sold his fleet of whaling-boats he took a trip out West and began to speculate in land. His friends said it was just like driving full sail onto Devil's Tooth. More they could not have said. Elijah Cowp's answer was a jet of tobacco fluid. More he could not have said. The discussion was ended. Both sides had done their duty. They parted friends still. In the end Elijah Cowp died worth a million and a half of dollars. And he left every cent of it to his adopted son, Cornelius Crook Cowp.

'Tis a sweet, humane bit of Evangelical doctrine, that to him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that he hath. As a pendant of evolution, and tricked out in the scientific garb of the survival of the fittest, it shows as grim as beautiful, as pitiless as true. But when it comes to us as a piece of evangel, then only do we recognize its sweet humanity and divine pitifulness, as it strips naked the ragged, and starves the hungry, and attacks the wounded, and exhausts the feeble, and pinches at last the flickering flame of life between its thumb and finger, and so prettily and piously facilitates the passage of the poor dear soul to another and a better world. It must have been by the play of this or some kindred law of Heaven, favorable to the favored, and a carrier of coals to Newcastle, that Cornelius Crook Cowp stood in the shoes he now wore.

Mr. Digby Roy's irony was but truth on edge when he declared that Providence was not in the habit of providing English estates for Yankee quarrymen to inherit. It was not. But Cowp with his one and a half millions was, as we have seen, both by nature and by grace, in the direct line of succession to any such piece of good-fortune. And so, legally, Abbot's Hey came to him as naturally as a small stream comes to a large one. He had no need of it, and so the right to it was invested in him by nature, grace applauding. On the whole, it was a good investment. There is something in proportioning the burden to the strength of the back. If Cowp could bear so bravely a million and a half of woe, the chances were he could carry another million and not break down. As yet, however, he had not the least inkling of any new burden to carry, and the man who now sat opposite to him, playing with the cropped ear of his bull-dog, had every intention of saving him, if possible, from a fresh infliction of woe.

"When did you land?"

"Three days ago. We had a beautiful passage across."

"Your first to England?"

"No, my second. I made a flying visit some eight years since, when I was at Harvard. You see I am not very old yet, and the world is a large place."

"To the young, yes."

"Oh, I have not been exactly a stay-at-home. I have been in every State and Territory in the Union, and that is more than a good many of my globe-trotting countrymen can say. I know

South America pretty well, and that is not done in a day. I have seen Persia, India, Burmah, China, and Japan."

"And now, I suppose, you are making for Paris, eh?"

"No. I seldom play the fool twice along the same line."

"Wise man. Nothing like variety even in folly."

"The last time I was here I made headlong for Paris. To be sure, I had only a week to stay, for I had to be back at college by a certain date. But that was no sufficient reason why I should give four days to Paris and only one to London. I am in no hurry, though, to go to London. I am going to see Old England this time."

"Going to coach it?"

"Well, I may do so. I like driving a four-in-hand. But that shall not prevent me from going where vehicles, I guess, cannot very well go. I understand that England's best beauties are not visible from the railroads or the highways. It would be strange if they were. I am going to foot it, sir. To me it will be a sort of pilgrimage."

"That sounds like a bit of sentiment," laughed Mr. Digby Roy.

"And perhaps it is. My mother, it is true, came of what we consider an old American stock. But my father—my father was an Englishman, sir."

"Ha, indeed, you don't say!" exclaimed Mr. Digby Roy.

"Yes; and though I am—perhaps I ought rather to say because I am—an American to the backbone, and proud of my country, I have in me a filial piety towards the Old Home, my father's birth-land."

"That is as it should be, my dear sir. But—your name is hardly English, is it?"

"Yes, beyond a doubt. Cowp was my mother's maiden name, but the Cowps were English a hundred and eighty years ago."

"Oh, I see. Then Cowp was not your father's name?"

"No. My uncle adopted me, and I took his name. Harold Crook was my father."

"And he was an Englishman, you say?"

"Did not you discover as much during your visit to Piupetaw?"

"Yes. Though, of course, I was not very much concerned with his history. I remember now that an old settler—let me see, what was his name? A tall, lean old chap, with a great reputation as a former slayer of bears and redskins—ah, I have it—

Judge Gordon, they called him. Well, I was going to say, the old judge told me that Harold Crook always went by the name of Squire Crook, because of his English manners and ways."

"Is that so? I never heard that; but then I have been there so little. One thing I do know, sir, and that is, my father was no common man. He was an English gentleman," said Cowp, with undisguised satisfaction.

"I can well believe it, Mr. Cowp. Do you know where he came from? Is the family still going here?"

"I don't quite know. My information at present is very meagre," answered Cowp, slowly, almost to hesitation.

"We have Crooks here, of course, though I never heard of any family of that name that I can remember—any family of importance, I mean," observed Mr. Digby Roy, looking closely at his visitor.

"No, perhaps not. But, then, my father's name was not—" He stopped, and gave a cough.

"Was not what?" asked Mr. Digby Roy, bluntly.

Cowp involuntarily raised his eyebrows a little, and a look of surprise flashed out for an instant.

"Oh, pardon me," cried Mr. Digby Roy, laughing lightly enough, "I thought you were going to say that your father's real name was not Harold Crook."

"Well, I guess I was. What then?" said Cowp; and the quick ear of Mr. Digby Roy caught an undertone of challenge.

"Oh, nothing that I know of. A biographical item of interest, of course. Some folk have silly prejudices, and see all kinds of evil shadowed forth in a change of name. To me it suggests always a romance, not a crime," he said, in his most conciliatory manner.

"As I said before, my father was a gentleman; so much I know. Also I know that he changed his name. His reason for doing so I do not know. Whether he sinned, or whether he was sinned against, I cannot say. And I don't know that, at this time o' day, it matters much. But why am I troubling you with all this? We will talk—"

"Believe me, I am interested, very. You will make some inquiries, surely, now you are over here?" said Mr. Digby Roy, who would have given almost anything to know if Cowp knew his father's true name.

"Possibly—nay, more, probably. The fact is, I have not come to England merely for pleasure. I have come to fulfil my father's—as you say, to make some inquiries. I am in no hurry, though, and my expectations, I assure you, are modest."

"An earldom and an estate," remarked Mr. Digby Roy, with a laugh that was openly satirical, for he was irritated with the half-confidences of Cowp.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OF THE "BLACKSMITH'S ARMS."

It was another hour before Cowp left the cottage on the common. The subject of his father had been dropped altogether, and that of Nathan Flint had received but little attention. Mr. Digby Roy had no questions to ask, and volunteered no information regarding the object of his visit to Piupetaw. On the other hand, he threw himself heart and soul into the not uncongenial task of making himself agreeable to his visitor. He strove to obliterate any unpleasant impression due to his momentary irritation or inquisitiveness.

Mr. Digby Roy was pre-eminently a ladies' man. He seemed to know them, and they seemed to know him. While other men approached them with all the laborious art of scientific siege, he walked straight up to them, and found the gates open to receive him. But though he was not a man's man, he could make himself very agreeable company when he cared to take the trouble. Cowp thought him one of the nicest fellows he had come across for many a day; and on his way back to the "Peahen" he had already, in fancy, got Mr. Digby Roy across the big herring-pond onto his own dear Cape Cod, and was entertaining him like a prince.

"Real nice fellow . . . like him immensely . . . gentleman every inch of him . . . cottage . . . queer notion . . . regular peasant's place to look at . . . wondered where on earth I was getting to . . . not poor . . . real elegant inside . . . sort of hermit, I guess . . . beauty of England. . . . A man can live his own life out, and public go hang . . . glad I didn't tell him anything more about

dad . . . don't know why, though . . . guess I'll run down there this afternoon . . . leave traps here . . . back in day or two, and keep promise to walk a bit with him. . . . What's in a name? . . . Silliest question ever asked. . . . Everything in a name . . . just to know his name, his real name. . . . Who he was . . . where he came from . . . a hundred thousand dollars? Pshaw, I would give half a million to-day gladly . . . fool and his money? . . . maybe, maybe not. . . . Folk used to believe that to know a name was to possess a part of its owner, so have power over him . . . certainly, not to know a name is not to know its owner . . . veil upon his face . . . I know it, I know it. . . . Oh, father, father, when I can lift the veil I think I shall see your face, your dear, obscured face! . . . let me see, I shall be twenty-eight in three weeks and two days . . . then, then, ah, then! . . . I wonder what . . . perhaps I shall regret it all my days . . . don't care a cent so long as I know. . . . Yes; I'll run down to-day . . . just time to catch the express north."

He caught it by a close shave. He had no luggage but a small hand-bag. Three hours later he was catching glimpses of the classic Scarthin, and had he known when and where to look, he could have seen the deep bend in the valley, above which was Voe, above which was Poloc. Truth to tell, however, the landscape was utterly wasted on him. The barbarous Yankee saw it, and saw it not. Wherefore were his eyes holden? Well, he thought that the best bit of scenery in the country was just then in the railway-carriage with him. And he was about right.

She had got in at the big station, where he had changed. She was dressed in a dainty costume of silver-gray, and, from several small parcels which the porter handed in, she might have been shopping. She looked just as pretty as a picture, and as sweet as a flower, and when she turned her clear, trustful, brown-gray eyes upon him the gentleman from Cape Cod felt himself for the first time in his life really under fire. He saw no reason why he should not speak to her. Soon he felt he must speak to her or—change carriages at the first station.

"Can you tell me, please, how far we are from Ipstones-under-Water?" he asked, and again for the first time in his life he was conscious of his American accent. He heard it distinctly. He found himself hoping that she would not notice it. She did, though, instantly, which, being an English girl, was a good thing for him.

She turned her face from the window, and looked him frankly in the eyes for a moment, then, with just a hint of a divine smile, she answered, "I think we are about ten miles. It is the fourth station from here."

The train was pulling up at a way-side station.

"You are not getting out here, are you?"

"No."

He did not change carriages.

He said, "I am very glad, very glad. I suppose there is some very fine scenery in this county?"

"Yes; I think it—glorious."

And the way she said it was glorious. It was worth all the guide-books and gazetteers in the kingdom.

"Then I am a lucky man. I am going to spend forty-eight hours in the neighborhood."

"Forty-eight hours?"

And she looked at him, and laughed. She showed her teeth in so doing, and the charm was complete.

"Why do you laugh?"

"You made me. It is such a funny idea!"

"Oh, I am very much of a sponge nature. I can absorb a good deal of the beautiful in a little time."

"I am sorry for—"

"Me?"

"No; Peakshire. Have you much beautiful scenery in America?"

"Excuse me, but why 'in America?'"

"Oh, pardon me! I thought you were an American."

"Indeed. Am I so little like an Englishman, then?"

"Oh no. The closer the likeness, the more striking the difference."

"I see. You are right; I am an American. You know where Cape Cod is, I presume?"

"Cape Cod? No; I do not think I ever heard of it."

"Really? Now am I sorry. I come from Cape Cod. It is part of Massachusetts, and runs right out into the sea—a peninsula."

"Thank you. I will look at the map when I reach home; and I do not think I shall forget where Cape Cod is in future. Is it very beautiful?"

"To those who love it, yes."

"Ah, that is always true. Is it very hilly?"

"Not at all. I think it is nothing but sand churned up by the sea. We have no mud, and we have the sea all about us—a couple of hinges these on which hangs, for me at least, the door of happiness."

"You like the sea?"

"Exceedingly."

"I should want a yacht if I lived by the sea."

"I have two."

"Two yachts?"

"Yes. One I've had a long time. She is a sailing boat—a beauty. The other is a steam-yacht. I have only just got it—an experiment. I have a prejudice in favor of sails, though there are some advantages in steam, I confess. Do you like sailing?"

"I do not know. I have never been on the water, except on rivers, and in a rowing boat."

"Poor child, what a shame!" he said, quite involuntarily, and in a most sympathetic tone. He saw her color rise, like the faint, delicate, first blush of a rose, but she was not angry?

She smiled, and said, "Oh, there is plenty of time. Life is long, and some day I will take my first lesson in sailing."

"I should like to be present."

"Probably, to watch my distress. I shall be alone."

"Really, that sounds very cynical. Do you think men generally like to watch maidens in distress?"

He was going to say ladies, but with a swift touch of guile he thought he would assume she was unmarried. He watched the effect closely, and it was *nil*. He thought, "No, she is not a wife, thank Heaven!" Now, why on earth should he thank Heaven? What odd creatures men are!

She said in answer, "One would think so, from the frequency with which they distress them. I think my first voyage would be to America."

"I am delighted to hear you say so. Honestly, I would lend you my yacht for the compliment."

"I did not mean it as a compliment, I am afraid. It must be a very interesting sight to see so large a country foreign yet full of English—a Continental England."

"You think of us Americans, then, as a variety of English, do you?"

"Always; and so you are. You yourself—none could mistake you, I should think, for a Frenchman, or a German, or a Spaniard, or an Italian; but you abound in the notes of an Englishman. Now, to see I know not how many millions of English variants playing, not an insular but a great Continental life, would be a fascinating study, I should think."

He thought within himself, "What a divine schoolmarm she would make!" Then, with a mental imprecation, he flung the "schoolmarm" idea away, neck and crop, as an impious play of imagination.

"Promise me that when you go across you will at least come and have a peep at Cape Cod?"

He seemed in earnest, whereat she laughed.

"I think I may safely promise," she said.

"Won't you come and have a look at my yachts? My *Sea-gull* is worth looking at."

"And where should I find your lovely *Sea-gull*?"

"Probably in Comfort Haven; that is my harbor. *Sea-gull* is the pride of the Cape. I believe they all think they own her. But the proper way to find her is to find her owner."

"I must lift up my voice, then, and cry aloud, 'Oh, where is *Sea-gull's* master?'"

"No; it will be enough if you murmur, 'The Duke of Cape Cod.' I shall know in no time that one asketh for me, and I will hasten to greet you with a sea-gull's speed."

"Then, are you a live duke?"

"By courtesy, yes. That is to say, the dear Cape Codders slang me outrageously, and call me 'Duke of Cape Cod.'"

"What quaint, delightful people they must be! If I ever visit America you may be sure— Oh, please, will you open the door for me? I get out here."

There was some little hurry and excitement, for the train was on the point of moving out of the pretty little country station. She bowed to him and moved away quickly. The guard came up and shut the door with a bang, and waved his hand, in which was a furled signal-flag.

Cried Cowp, thrusting his head out of the window, "How far from Ipstones-under-Water?"

The train was moving. Guard blew his whistle, waved his flag, and then turned to Cowp with a good-natured "Now then, sir, if you please—Ipstones-under-Water. Look alive, sir, if you please."

Cowp bundled out in a trice.

"Any luggage, sir?"

"No," he said, thinking to himself that that guard deserved a medal for politeness. There are many guards that deserve medals for politeness. Cowp thrust half-a-crown into the man's hand. Virtue is occasionally rewarded in this world, though not so frequently as to justify any one in following it for a living.

When Cowp looked round for the girl in gray she had disappeared. Some distance off, a turn in the road showed him a carriage-and-pair rolling away. That the girl in gray was in that phaeton never entered his head. There was a gig ahead and some pedestrians and a pony-carriage. Perhaps he would overtake her if she was walking.

Said the station-master to him, "Came pretty nigh going on, sir. If Boden had been guard instead o' Holmes, happen he'd have carried you on to the next station, rather than pull up again."

"It was rather stupid of me, I confess. But why don't you paint up the name of the station?"

"Why, bless your heart, sir, there it is, as large as life!" he cried, pointing to a lamp on the glass of which was painted the name of the station, in letters about three-quarters of an inch long.

"Ah yes, I see. You call that as large as life, eh?"

"An' it's about true, sir, for we're a mighty small place. Three housen in all there is to it."

"How far am I from Abbot's Hey?"

"Three mile by the road; little over two, 'cross fields. If you're going to the Hall, sir, it's a pity you didn't speak sooner. The carriage came down for the young lady."

"I am not going to the Hall; I am going to the church-yard."

The station-master opened his mouth and dropped out "Oh!" in a sepulchral tone. Then he added, with a painfully funereal smile, "Pardon, sir, but I hope you aren't going to put up there? Poor place of entertainment."

"Is that so? Not well kept, eh?"

"Pretty well kept, sir, and rather popular—among the natives. It doesna cater much for foreigners."

"Then I won't tax its hospitality this time—not if I can help it, that is. I suppose there is an inn near there where I can put up for the night?"

"Yes, sir, there's the 'Blacksmith's Arms'—you canna miss it—at the dip o' the hill below the church, just afore you come to the mill. You'll be as comfortable there as a toad under a bulrush. They wunna rob you, nor starve you, but just treat you like—your pardon, sir—what you ought to be, if you binna—meaning a gentleman. Follow this road sir, straight on till—As I was about to say, it's my sister's husband as keeps the house. Take the first turn to the left, half a mile or so on, and it'll lead you straight there, sir. Shall I send my lad to carry your hand-bag, sir?"

"Thank you, no; it is not heavy. Good-day, sir."

It was dusk when the Duke of Cape Cod entered the "Blacksmith's Arms." He was tired and hungry, and in less than an hour he was in bed and asleep.

When he awoke it was broad daylight. He looked at the white curtains of the bed, at the white curtains to the window, at the white boards of the room with strips of carpet here and there, at the quaint old oak furniture, and at the quainter if not older pictures and ornaments. Clean as an egg, sweet as a nosegay. Through the latticed window he saw lozenges of blue sky and drooping sprays of laburnum. The window was open, and a soft wind was stirring. It brought with it the odor of the hawthorn blossom, the hum of bees, the bleating of sheep and young lambs, the bellowing of a bull-calf, the muffled ring of hammer and anvil, together with a distant chirring sound and the mellow rumble of falling water. Now and then human voices afar, and the laughter of children. Cowp lay in his bed, and looked, and sniffed, and listened, and took it all in, and, like a wise man, filled his soul through his senses, and tasted the beauty of life, and was glad.

"Ah!" he murmured, at intervals, "ah, this is England! this is England!"

He got up and looked out, and saw—a bit of England. This was in front of him: an old-fashioned flower-garden; a sandy road; a pasture, with a row of oaks in the hedge, and a glorious chestnut, solitary, in the middle; a couple of meadows, piebald with buttercups and daisies; a deep valley, heavily wooded; and

then uplands, uplands stretching to the sky. Of a sudden he drew back quickly behind the curtains through which he peered.

"Yes, it is she, it is she—dainty and picturesque as a shepherdess," he murmured, *mit halber stimme*.

CHAPTER XXVII.

OF THE HEART-ACHE OF AN EXILE.

It was ten o'clock when Cowp came down to breakfast, and being accustomed to the early hours of his people, he felt half ashamed of himself. After breakfast he lighted a cigar and strolled out. The landlord, who was also the village blacksmith, came out of his smithy and greeted him.

"My missis's brother, as is station-master at Ipstones, was round here this morning, and said you was after looking at the churchyard, sir. Happen you've come to take a peep at the yews, sir?"

"The yews? Yes, to be sure. I guess they are worth looking at?" responded Cowp, glad to have discovered a reason for being where he was.

"Well, that's as you think, sir. Tastes differ. Off at Dimock dale yonder, they's got some tidy big uns, and fairly owd too; an' they mak' noise enow about 'em. But them as have seen both, think ourn kings and queens aside 'em. You're a stranger in these parts, I take it?"

"Quite so. Who lives yonder?" asked Cowp, pointing to where a score of chimney-tops were visible above the foliage.

"Yon place on the hill is the Hall. Squire Oldcastle lives there. He owns, lord almighty, miles round. New-comers they be. Jest opened their aprons, an' all this Twigg property as was, come tumbling down into 'em, like apples from a tree. Not but what he's a tidy sort of a man is Mr. Squire, 'earty and haffable."

"Who was that young lady that went by here about an hour and a half ago? dressed in white, with pink ribbons. I think I travelled with her on the cars, I mean by train, yesterday," said Cowp, in as careless a tone as he could command.

"Oh, I reckon you mean Dorothy Blackwall. She passed along about an hour sen. But it wasna pink ribbins she wore, or my eyes are getting the wus for wear. They was blue ribbins, sir."

"Perhaps you are right. I thought they were pink, though. And pray, who is Miss Dorothy Blackwall?"

"Her's the daughter o' Farmer Blackwall, at Rakeway Farm, jest behind the shou'der of yon hill, where that heifer shows agen the sky, sir."

"Farmer's daughter, eh?"

"Yes; an' a very nice, tidy sort o' gell too. Purty as a picter. Her's home jest now from collidge, as they ca' it, where she's a-shapin' to be a schoolmissis."

"Indeed! Well, I think I will stroll along now, and take a look at the yews."

On his way up the short, steep road, shaded by great spreading chestnut-trees, that led to the church, Cowp revolved in his mind the idea of Miss Dorothy Blackwall.

"Then I was right . . . a divine school-marm . . . pity . . . pretty name, Dorothy Blackwall . . . Dorothy, sweet Dorothy, quaint Dorothy, my lady Dorothy, my . . . love Dorothy—eh, what's that? . . . You fool, you bottomless donkey . . . a farmer's daughter . . . sometimes farmers are gentlemen, I believe . . . she was meant for a lady, anyway, if ever girl was . . . I'm not a fool, you insufferable cad within . . . wish I could throw you to the devil . . . what if her father were a hangman? . . . she is—she, and nobody else . . . lovely eyes . . . chin . . . mouth . . . nose . . . teeth . . . head . . . form . . . down, cad, down . . . she's like the scenery—glorious . . . if I could manage to run across her again . . . holloa! here I am . . . and he was here . . . passed through this very lych-gate . . . father, father, would you were with me now! . . ."

In the region about Abbot's Hey, what is not in a hollow must needs be on a hill. Every church and every church-yard should stand on a hill-top, open to all the winds of heaven; this for the sake of idealism and symbolism. The church at Abbot's Hey, a little formless structure of brick, yet venerable for its antiquity, stood on the summit of a conical hill, with its head to the east. In place of the usual tower, spire, or steeple, it possessed a large and gracefully proportioned dome of stone, and

painted red with perhaps half an eye to the color of the brick. The first impression was rather startling; but if one's nerves held out, and the cupola was allowed to discourse its own argument, the final impression was decidedly favorable. Certainly it conferred on the little squab amorphous church a mark of distinction, if not of distinction.

The glory of the church-yard was not in its dead. These were many, but of the humble sort, who ran naturally to friable headstones that dropped their letters annually, like leaves in autumn, and soon laid themselves low on the ground, like treacherous sentinels asleep. There were three tombs of the Twiggs, with mighty marble chests that looked like Roman sarcophagi, ringed in with iron palisades, high, and spear-shaped. An extinct family of Bellairs made a brave show of marble and granite, but not to the abasement of the Twiggs. Also, over a young girl's grave was a full-length figure of a dwarf angel, cut in stone, with outspread wings. In the gloaming it looked remarkably like a monster bat, and was calculated to make one shy of angels.

The glory of the church-yard was in its trees. It had two or three royal oaks, whose hearts were big and stout when the Spanish Armada was broken and scattered by the winds and waters that serve and do obey. It had half a dozen yew-trees that might have furnished bows for the battle of Hastings. Thick in girth, knotted, gnarled, and twisted, with wide-spreading branches, they seemed fearfully old and alive. They were not things, they were creatures; semi-human and half-monstrous guardians of the dead, grim of aspect, but not sour of heart, not devilish, not brutal. For ages they had fed on Humanity. Humanity is not assimilated, it assimilates. And though the divine mysterious flash of consciousness was not to be struck in them, nor to strike them, something of soul, dull and diffused as the sense of touch, had crept into them and made them more than trees.

One of these yews grew close to a grass-covered bank, surmounted by a thick, well-trimmed hedge of thorn; it was immediately opposite the second of the three Twigg tombs, which stood in a row some eight or ten feet from the bank. Under this yew, with his back resting against the bank, Cowp sat down, and drew from a pocket-book a couple of envelopes. One was sealed in three places, and bore this direction: "*For Cornelius*

Crook Cowp. Not to be opened till he has passed his twenty-eighth birthday." Cowp read the inscription as he had done a thousand times before, looked at it back and front, and sighed.

"I wonder what it contains . . . where can it be . . . why here . . . never should have thought time could have dragged so . . . twenty-two days to wait . . . eternity . . . wonder, now I am here on the spot, if I could read anything fresh in it . . . no new meaning possible . . . sucked it dry, I fancy . . . try, anyway."

With that he put away the sealed envelope, and turned his attention to the other one. On this was written: "*For Cornelius Crook Cowp, from his father Harold Crook. Not to be opened until he has turned one-and-twenty.*"

"It seems an age ago," he murmured, as he drew forth a letter and carefully spread it. He knew every word it contained by heart, but he read it now by the light of a new experience, of local knowledge. And he read it, hoping to find in it some hint, however slight, some clew, however slender, which had hitherto escaped him.

"MY DEAR SON,—When you read this I shall long have been in my grave, for I am now sick unto death. The doctor says so, and I believe him, not only because he has the power to make his word come true, but also and chiefly because I feel I am as good as a dead man already. You are only a wee bit bairn now, as Scottie of the clearing by Bear's Creek would say; just turned six. But you will be a man when you read this. If your mother still lives, cherish her, lad. According to her lights, which were sometimes dim, I will admit, she has been a good and true wife to me. Therefore I say, cherish her, my lad. I never told her what I am going to tell you. Somehow I could not. Shame and perhaps something else had something to do with it. She knows next to nothing of my past history, before I married her. For I did marry her, lad, eleven clear months before you were born. And the proof of it may be found in the city hall in Mountain City, Hosh Kosh County, in this same territory of Wyoming, which may Heaven prosper! There, too, in the same place, may be found the register of your birth, always supposing that the doctor that brought you into this goodly land did his duty and was no liar, and that the city clerk was not too drunk to write legibly. I guess you will find it all right, because as a

native-born citizen you were much of a rarity, and prized accordingly by the municipal authorities.

“My boy, my dear boy, know this: your father loves you to the core of his heart. Since I have had you to live for I have been a good man. I have, it is true, not had many temptations to be bad; but the fewer opportunities of pleasure we have, the more we appreciate them when they come along. I don't mean that, exactly; though there is something pleasant in doing wrong. But if I had been tempted ever so much, the thought of you would have kept me straight. Ah me, I am very weak, and if I do not hurry up I shall be too late! Last autumn, lad—I might have foreseen what was coming, but I didn't; I thought I was good for another ten years—your mother, as you know, went to spend two or three months with you and your uncle at Cape Cod. As letters only reach us here once a week, and as I was, so I told her, going hunting, I told her not to expect to hear from me by post. After she had been gone a couple of days I pulled out some dozen of Bank of England notes, that had been in hiding for many a long year, and I followed her east, but not to Cape Cod. No; I took ship at New York and went home, home to England. My boy, God grant you may never know the ache of an exile's heart! I had it for years—the hunger undying, the thirst unquenchable. Thank God, I lived to ease it, and now I can die happy. When I landed I stumbled and fell to the ground on purpose, and so without being thought a madman I kissed my mother-land.

“I went straight to a place called Abbot's Hey, in Peakshire. It was not my home. My home was a hundred miles nearer London. You will know where in due time. I had no desire to go there. Father and mother, I knew, were both dead, and I had no desire to renew my acquaintance with any of the people. But when my heart used to ache with the ache of exile, it was at the remembrance of Abbot's Hey. When I was a nipper an uncle of mine lived there, and he was rather fond of me. I went to stay there pretty often. Once I stayed a whole year. On and off, I guess I must have been there the best part of four or five years. I knew every field, every lane, every bit of wood, every rook that cawed in the tall trees. I knew the pools in the streams where the trout lay. I was young, innocent, happy in those days. That was why I went back to Abbot's Hey.

“My uncle was dead and gone; he lay in the old church-yard, within sight of the red dome, almost within shadow of the yews, the finest yews in Old England. Somebody else lived at the old home, relatives, blood connections that is, but I did not know them, and didn’t want to, either. I had with me a little iron box that I got on purpose, about ten inches long and six deep, fastened with a padlock. I put in it a few heirlooms that I valued highly, some documents proving my identity, and a short account of some passages in my past history, together with a full statement of who I am. For you must know, my boy, my real name is not Harold Crook. What it is you will learn in due time. This box I buried in the church-yard at Abbot’s Hey. With this letter I inclose another, which you will not open till you are turned eight-and-twenty. In it you will find full directions how and where to find the buried box. Therefore, guard it well. Without it you are nobody’s child, only Harold Crook’s. With it you will know everything.

“My boy, there is one dreadful and shameful secret in my life. When you open the box you will learn it. If I could undo it, I would give my heart’s blood to do so, for your sake. Forgive me, my boy, forgive me, forgive me! Now I must end this. But first I must tell you this—it might help you in the time of temptation—*your father was an English gentleman*. Don’t forget it, my lad. It is something to be proud of. A better title than that of an English gentleman is borne by no man on earth. Would God your father had been worthy of it! May my son be worthy of it! This is the dying prayer of your father, known as

“HAROLD CROOK.”

CHAPTER XXVIII.

OF A DIVINE SCHOOLMARM.

OVER this message from the dead sat Cowp, musing for a long time. The dramatic unities were all in his favor, but they shed no new light, revealed no fresh meaning. Where in Abbot’s Hey could his father’s uncle have lived? There were, perhaps, a score of houses dotted here and there, including a group beyond the

church of six or seven, which served to present some resemblance to a village. There seemed a good number of farm-houses, big and little. He had not explored the neighborhood, it was true, and what lay hidden away behind the numerous patches of woodland, and the low hills, sometimes bold and abrupt, and sometimes swelling into semi-globes, grass-covered and smooth or crowned with hanging woods of pines and larches, was hard to say.

From what the blacksmith had said regarding the extent of the Squire's estate, it seemed improbable that any gentry resided in the parish, except those at the Hall. For a while he allowed his mind to linger on the pleasant thought that the home of so much of his father's boyhood had been at the Hall. But Cowp's web of reason was pretty close, and though it was shot with bright threads of imagination, it retained its fundamental quality of sobriety. He put the Hall on one side.

He noted for the first time the reticence of the letter concerning the social condition of the uncle; he might have been, for all it told him to the contrary, a miller or a farmer. It did not even inform him whether the uncle in question was such on the spear-side or spindle-side. His father was a gentleman. It did not follow that his mother was a lady. By the same token, it did not follow that his paternal grandmother was a lady. The reticence of the letter seemed favorable to the conclusion that the uncle was a man of no particular substance.

"A farmer probably . . . Dorothy Blackwall's father is a farmer . . . irony . . . delicious . . . you confounded cad within, how do you like it? . . . Serve you jolly well right . . . turn up your nose, lift up your eyebrows now, if you can . . . at Rakeway Farm perhaps . . . who knows? . . . the Blackwalls might be my own kith and kin. . . . Sweet Dorothy my thirty-first cousin . . . wouldn't mind a cent, if it carried with it cousinly license to kiss her . . . half a mind to stumble carelessly upon Rakeway . . . spy the land . . . parents maybe are simple, humble folk . . . see Dorothy . . . displeased? . . . like as not . . . caught unawares . . . not pleasant . . . I must see her, though; thirty-first cousin or not, I must see her before I leave, and I leave to-morrow, early."

At that moment he fully intended to get up and go in search of the "divine schoolmarm." But such is the weakness of the flesh, and so pleasant is it to close one's eyes when a feeling of

drowsiness creeps over one in the sunshine, that Cowp lay back and went fast asleep. In dream-land he met her, and with that admirable facility and celerity in accomplishing most difficult enterprises, which equally characterize the kindred worlds of dream, of fiction, and of faith, and are a severe reflection on our own waking world, which we cannot control, where things move slowly, and things pleasant to the eye and good for food are hard to come at—he not only met her, but wooed her, and won her, and carried her off, as the Duchess of Cape Cod, to his peninsular home across the sea. On the whole, it was worth going to sleep, to accomplish so much in so short a time. It was really disappointing, though, to wake up and find that a piece of experience so full of delight was, after all, nothing but an “elegant dream.”

“I am hungry,” he said, not in any metaphysical or rhapsodical sense, but with an honest English meaning. He thought only of a cut of cold roast beef and a tankard of good beer. Prosaic but sane. Half an hour later he had these. He found them very good.

“This is no dream, but it is just elegant. . . . Roast beef of Old England forever!”

Vulgar creature with an antediluvian appetite—how we envy—no, no—pity him! There followed a pipe—he was very human. Then he became romantic, and a proper gentleman to read about, and went out in search of sweet Dorothy Blackwall. Rakeway Farm, as we know, lay just behind the shoulder of the hill, where the heifer showed against the sky. The heifer was not stationary, but the hill was; and Cowp had little difficulty in finding his way. In crossing a meadow he got an unexpected view of the park belonging to the Hall, one corner of which adjoined the meadow. It was such a fine, rich view that he was tempted to leave the path and draw near to the opening in the hedge.

To any well-ordered mind it is a pleasure to trespass; some severely virtuous souls have even recognized it as a duty. Cowp, tramping through the long grass, was conscious of the heroic delight that touches those brave souls who defy the threat of prosecution. He was almost sorry when he saw, half-buried in the angle of two hedges, a stile formed of a couple of upright stones. It suggested right of way, use and wont, legality, and a sort of “great heaven-high unquestionability.” The charm of the trespassing lies in trespassing. And in these high moods stiles are

charm-killing impertinences. Cowp went through the stile, and sat down on a big branch-like root of an oak-tree that sprawled along the surface of the ground for a good dozen feet before it burrowed its tip and hid itself. He did not like it at all. The effect upon his mind was odd; it was an impression allied to that of immodesty. He mused, gazing over the rolling expanse of park land.

“Roots of trees should be in the soil . . . deep . . . hidden . . . same with roots of character . . . self-revelation in man implies absence of reserve . . . equals not frankness . . . not candor . . . not simplicity . . . shamelessness rather . . . colossal vanity . . . impudent egotism . . . Rousseau for instance . . . last man on earth who could afford the dreadful luxury . . . always so . . . a man who could afford to do it would not for his salvation . . . you impudent old radix . . . see the result of egotism . . . you should be clothed with a tender white skin . . . sprawling here in the sunshine, you must needs grow a regular bark, hard as iron . . . fool, fool, fool . . . deep down in the dark, mysterious soil where the fountains bubble up with the sacred and sweet and wonderful waters of life freely . . . juices, strange juices of the body . . . and the soul . . . fool, egotistic fool, good-day.”

He rose and went along the park for some distance, bearing always in the direction of Rakeway. He came presently into an avenue of beeches. There were double rows on each side, forming a lofty sun-proof aisle with softened lights and deliciously cool greenery. As he entered it there came towards him slowly an old man leaning on the arm of a young woman, and yet more heavily on his stout oak stick. He had the appearance somewhat of a gentleman of straitened means. His infirmity seemed less that of age than of sorrow. At first Cowp thought it might be the Squire and his daughter, for such he supposed was the “young lady” mentioned by the station-master. He decided, however, that it was not.

When they met, said Cowp, raising his hat, “I am afraid I am trespassing?”

The old man halted and looked sharply at Cowp. He was evidently a little deaf, for he turned to his companion and said, “What does the gentleman say, Janet?”

“He is afraid he is trespassing, father,” she answered.

Cowp looked at her, and his heart almost bled with quick pity.

She was quite young, not more than thirty, yet her hair was already streaked with gray. 'Twas not the silver sheen on her hair, however, that so touched him, though it added to the effect. It was the blended sweetness and sadness of her countenance.

"My soul, but that girl has suffered! What a face for the Mother of God! What lovely, woful eyes! . . . If it were only want of money, now . . . how glad I should be . . . no, no, it is a deeper woe than that, I guess."

Said the old man, almost sharply, "Yes, you are certainly trespassing if you have not Squire Oldcastle's permission."

"Oh, father dear, I don't think Mr. Oldcastle would mind the gentleman a bit," put in Janet, whose mission in life, apart from that of suffering, was to soften asperities.

Ever blessed are the few whose wit and wisdom run to the construction of bridges of brotherhood and sympathy and good-fellowship across the deep dividing streams and rivers of selfishness and prejudice which intersect humanity in every direction.

"Janet, you know not what you say. Trespass is trespass, and if you give an inch they will take an ell," said the old man, ever suspicious of strangers, and dreading for reasons of his own anything resembling intrusion on his privacy.

"I have walked here regularly every day for some years," he added, "and in the whole time I have not met half a dozen intruders. It is not for me, or for you, daughter, to sanction the beginning of a bad practice."

"I only thought, dear, that as the gentleman is a stranger, and"—here she gave Cowp a look in the eyes and a faint smile—"is not likely to come here often if—"

"I have never been here before in my life, and I do not expect I shall ever be here again," put in Cowp, not a little amused at the pertinacity of the old man, who guarded another man's land as if it had been his own.

"In that case nothing more need be said. It is a beautiful avenue of trees, sir, a beautiful avenue of trees. Good-day, good-day. Come, Janet, child."

And the old man and his daughter passed on.

Near the end of the avenue a well-defined trail, that looked like a foot-path, ran across the park, to the left, in the direction of the hill behind which lay Rakeway. Cowp followed it, and it led him to a dip in the land where there were some black fantastic rocks

and a never-silent streamlet, and a black fir spinney beyond. He stooped to drink of the water clear as crystal, and when he raised himself up, behold, in front of him, just issuing from the spinney, was the—divine schoolmarm!

“Well, well,” he cried, as he saluted her, “who would have thought it! It is almost like meeting with an old friend.”

“The Duke of Cape Cod, I believe? Is his Grace well?” she said, with grave and pretty irony, as she gave him her hand in response to his own, which was out-stretched with masculine boldness.

“His Grace is in excellent health, thank you, but he is feeling lonely, like a pelican in the wilderness, or a stork on one leg beside the salt marsh. Why didn’t you tell me that it was Ipstones-under-Water?”

“I forgot to, I was in such a hurry. Did you go on?” she said, laughing.

“No, I bundled out just in time. I am staying till to-morrow morning at the ‘Blacksmith’s Arms.’ What an idyllic spot that is!”

“You like it, do you?”

“It fulfils my dream of an English country inn. Not long ago I was asked if I wrote poetry, and having no special objection to telling the truth, I said no. But if I tarried long at Abbot’s Hey I guess I should have to either write it or read it.”

“I should advise you to read it, then; though that is sometimes almost as great a penalty as to write it.”

“To hear you, one would think you had a brother, or a—cousin, who was a confirmed poet. What kind of poetry do you happen to like best, Miss Blackwall?”

A swift and frank expression of surprise came over her. He did not wonder at it—not a bit. Of course she was surprised that he had discovered her name. It was quite amusing to him. He saw her lips part, but she checked herself in time, and made no allusion to it.

She answered, “Oh, the poetry of—Nature.”

He laughed. “So do I; it is so natural. This whole region is one great physical poem. You said it was, and it is just glorious. I shall never forget it, or—you.”

His boldness sent a tingle through him; and through the girl there went a quick, electric thrill. Nevertheless, certain of her petals, to speak so, closed instantly, and with beautiful instinct.

She half inclined her head, as if in mute and gracious acknowledgment of an intended compliment, as she asked, "Are the common people of America lovers of the beautiful?"

"The common people of America? There are none. At least I never heard of them. And I am sure I never set eyes on an American man who would classify himself, or would allow any one else to classify him, as a common man."

"Why, have you no poor people, and uneducated?"

"Yes, I am sorry to say we have, lots of them. But, well—I guess I should find it rather difficult to make you understand, quite."

"I will try hard, if you have the courage of the attempt," she said, with a pretty, half-disdainful toss of her head.

"You know I didn't mean anything—rude. I only meant that it is next to impossible for any one to realize a foreign experience. If you came across a man, poor and uneducated, but a born earl or duke, would you call him a common man?"

"No, of course not."

"Then be it known unto you, O lady, that in America we are all born free and equal, and we take care to be born not at the bottom, but at the top. If we are not born kings and emperors, we are all born earls and dukes, equals of any nobles on earth. At least we think so, and we try to feel so. Thus we have no common people, in your meaning of the phrase, except the foreigners; and they, in six months after landing, become not earls or dukes or their equals, but kings and emperors. They are our tyrants, God bless 'em!"

"Dear me, I cannot understand it," she observed, with grave simplicity.

"There, I told you," he retorted.

And they laughed together, and wist not that mutual laughter was as a delicate net thrown over them.

She said, "Then you all think and feel alike, I suppose?"

"Yes, in a certain sense we do. Of course we have our differences, but we differ as equals. Our national consciousness, so to speak, is one and indivisible in a sense unknown in England. Here the national consciousness seems to exist in separate layers, corresponding largely with the different layers of society. There is the aristocratic layer of consciousness, the middle-class layer, and the lower-class layer. And these represent, it seems to me,

three different ways of looking at life—three different ideals of life. In America there is nothing at all corresponding to this. Our differences resemble the difference between a Conservative peer and a Liberal peer, rather than that between a peer of any political complexion and, say, a mechanic or a retail grocer.”

“Ah, I see now what you mean. But it is very strange. Is it a desirable state of national consciousness, do you think?”

“Well, you have applied to the right quarter to get a prejudiced answer. But though I am royal, I am, I hope, not altogether blind. There are defects and drawbacks unquestionably. I said our differences resembled those existing between two peers of opposite politics. It would have been more exact to say, they resemble those between two intelligent middle-class merchants of opposite politics.”

“That is to say,” she said, with a laugh, “your national consciousness is not exactly aristocratic?”

“I am afraid that is so. As in blood, so in ideals: we are sprung from, we are allied to, the great middle class of England. Upper middle class indeed, but still middle class. We were never Cavaliers. We are still Puritans. We have borrowed some of the manners and customs, some of the habiliments, some of the vices, of the Cavaliers. But under all this disguise we remain Puritan.”

“Well, it adds a little variety, at any rate.”

“Our borrowing? You are right. A national Puritanic consciousness is apt to be a trifle monotonous. That is our weakness. We are strong and restless as the sea, and as monotonous. You pay, in this world, not only for your vices, but for your virtues also. But to pay a good sound interest on profits made is one thing. To pay cent per cent out of your capital is another thing. And something like that is the difference between what one pays for virtue and what one pays for vice. But tell me, please, those ribbons, I mean your sash and bows and what not, are they blue or pink?”

She looked at him for some moments in quiet astonishment, and then said, “I don’t know how they impress your national consciousness, one and indivisible, but in me they produce a sensation of pinkness. Are you color-blind?”

“I did not know it. Mine host of the ‘Blacksmith’s Arms’ is color-blind, I think. I saw you pass by this morning, and when

I described you to him, he said, in his own words, 'they was blue ribbins' you wore, and not pink.'

"I see. So that was the way you learned my name was Dorothy Blackwall, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"And I may also suppose that you learned all there was to learn about me?"

"Yes. It wasn't much, though."

"For instance?"

"That your father was a farmer. I like farming."

"Anything else?"

"That you live at Rakeway Farm. Pretty name."

"You were on your way there, perhaps, when I met you?"

"I was."

"Nearest way round, sir. Did you learn anything more, may I ask?"

"No, I think not—oh yes, I forgot. You are home from college. You are being trained for a schoolma—mistress."

She laughed right out, merrily and wickedly. Cowp wished she would not do it.

"And you say you forgot it! Was it above or below your sympathetic interest?"

"Neither, I assure you. It interested me greatly. Do you know, in the train I took you for a divine—I beg pardon—for a school-mistress. I did indeed."

"How very singular! Your power of penetration, of insight, must be very keen, Mr.—?"

"Cowp. My name is Cornelius Crook Cowp," he said, feeling a little bit shaky as he pulled out his card-case and gave her his card.

"Oh, thank you, I shall not forget it. And you live at Cape Cod, I think?"

"I do."

"And your father is a—a farmer?"

"No, an angel."

"Oh, I beg pardon. But—originally?"

"He died when I was young. I was brought up with an uncle. My father was a—a hunter."

"A hunter? Do you mean a game-keeper?" she said, with exquisite insolence. Cowp winced.

"No, not exactly. He did not keep game, he killed it. His game was bears, buffaloes, big deer, and—and Indians."

"Oh, what a pleasant calling for a future—angel! And you—are you a school-master?"

"No; I am nothing. I am an idle vagabond. I toil not, neither do I spin. I go to and fro over the face of the earth."

"I thought so when I met you in the train. I said to myself: 'Mephistopheles from New York.' But I must really wish you good-day. If I am not back home soon I shall be too late to make up the butter. This is churning day, you know, sir, at Rakeway Farm."

She gave him a glance so full of pretty mockery and raillery that it left him dumb. She was gone before he had time to say Bo.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OF REBECCA ON ARABLE LAND.

It is time that we paid a visit to our friends the Oldcastles in their new home. And we could not, perhaps, choose a better time than the afternoon of the day following Cowp's meeting with the "divine schoolmarm" in the park. Cowp's train is just steaming out of Abbeystead station, leaving that gentleman on the platform, as we approach the Hall.

Abbot's Hey—for the hamlet had taken its name from the Hall—was a "Tudor-chimneyed bulk of mellow brick-work" in what may be called the florid Gothic style. It had a battlemented front, with towers, and a flat, arched gate-way that gave on to a central court. Castellet never looked braver, mellower, more dignified. On the west side there was a broad terrace, whence one had a superb outlook over wooded valleys, bold, towering rocks, and far-reaching uplands, here and there green with the springing corn, and patched with clumps of timbers, but mostly dark with heather, the breeding-ground of grouse. To the south (or front) and east there was less of wildness visible, less of savagery, less of the picturesque. The prospect was one of smooth, round, soft, swelling hills, like breasts, with open valley-lands, where the cattle grazed knee-deep in sweet, rich grass, or, lying down, showed

through the butter-cups the tops only of their backs, like strips of dull red earth. Farm-houses thrust their gables from behind the shoulders of the hills, or pushed their chimneys above the tree-tops, while lowly cottages curled their blue smoke against the light greensward and the dark-green foliage. And so the landscape was humanized.

On the terrace sat Priscilla, knitting stockings for Silas, and neither she nor her knitting-kneedles looked out of place. With her was Margaret, in whose lap lay some embroidery; but the girl's hands were idle, though her thoughts were busy. She was thinking of—whom? Not Mr. Digby Roy, that is certain. A flight of broad, shallow steps at each end of the terrace led on to a gravel walk below, across which was a wide band of lawn. Beyond this, the land sloped in terraces ornamented with belvederes, alcoves, statues, and huge flower-pots, down to the foot of the hill, where were shrubberies with winding walks, fern grottos, moss beds, an ever-babbling stream, and shroudy cavities in the live rock, where one could sit and play hermit for an hour, or lover, or misanthrope, or any other fictitious part.

Such a retreat is not only an “elegant adjunct” to a country-house, but is a downright god-send, with which the near-looming Parish Councils of the future will, questionless, see to it that every house is provided. A temple of sighs and vows to the beardless love-monger, and to the soft-eyed blushet, ready for the altar, though dreaming as a makeshift, pitiable always and sometimes tragic, of hospital wards, of gentle sisterhoods, of conventual vows. To the wiser and sadder man a porch of philosophy, a parade-ground of emotions, an arena of passions, a school of ideas, and a rendezvous of moods light as laughter, salt as tears, mocking as hopes, and bitter as memory. Ladies and gentlemen, voters all, let us agitate, agitate, agitate for the private shrubbery at the public expense.

On one of these sloping terraces overlooking the shrubberies was Rebecca Oldcastle. She made no pretence of industry, but sat on one of the steps of a little semicircular alcove, that looked as if it had been broken off from some Turkish mosque, and toyed with the lace of her crimson sunshade. In front of her stood her dear brother Silas, who, it is grievous to relate, was in his shirt-sleeves. It is only fair to add that he wore beautiful linen; and if the picturesque counts for anything, he had not sacrificed every

shred of our interest in him by doffing his coat, which hung ironically through the bent arm of a life-sized Venus, that made an amiable attempt at modesty under adverse circumstances. With his riding-breeches and tight leggings, he lacked only an open vest richly embroidered in scarlet and gold to make him look the complete and pretty gentleman.

Just now he looked as savage and interesting as a brigand, for he had been having a semi-confidential talk with Rebecca. Whenever he talked with Rebecca he was sure to get savage. Sometimes he was savage with her, sometimes with Priscilla the Beati-fied, sometimes with some things, sometimes with all things; but oftenest of all, he got savage with himself. He would not like to have said that it was Rebecca that made him savage, but he thought it and felt it, in a dim sort of way.

Said Rebecca, "Get enjoyment out of it all? Well, I should hope so. Of course I do. And I am inclined to think that I am the only one, within a hundred yards of that indecent figure there, who does."

"Meaning me, your only brother, of course. It is enough for the happiness of some good people, if only their friends and neighbors and relations are miserable," quoth Silas, whose nature was so mellow and genial that when he tried his hand at cynicism the effect was inevitably that of humor.

"Meaning me, your only sister, of course. And, pray, what is there to make you miserable? Your sins ought, no doubt, but they do not. I am as happy as a grasshopper," said Rebecca, blithely.

"Yes, Becky, that's because you are above the position—or below it. Blest if I know which!"

"Thank you, brother. But I have nothing to learn concerning the limitations of your knowledge."

"You are one of those wise virgins—or foolish ones—who don't care a brass farthing whether they live in a cottage or a castle; whether they travel first or third class."

"While you travel first, but would enjoy yourself ever so much better if you could go third."

"Drat it, Sharp-tongue, but I think that isn't a mile off the truth!"

"Then why not go third-class? Borrow your bailiff's dress, and I give you my word nobody would ever recognize you as the Squire. Why don't you?"

"Why don't I? Why, because I'm ringed in with women-folk like a rose amid thorns, all ready to prick, prick, prick me to death."

"Bless me, what conceit! I should have said, like a dead rose-stick among sweet flowers, dear drother."

"This dining at half-past seven every night—and she'd have had it at eight, if I hadn't stood out against it tooth and nail. As though an honest stomach could wait till supper-time for its dinner! And then, instead of sitting down in a proper Christian fashion, to have to rig one's self up like a waiter at an inn, and sit up stiff like a mummy, and stare at the women-folk with their naked shoulders, or, if you happen to be a modest man, to blush for 'em. And, worst of all, the dinner going all the time anywhere except where it ought."

"Yes, I have been afraid you were getting thin, brother," chirruped Rebecca, with gnat-like irony.

"Oh! it's an infernal shame, Becky, that a man should have to put up with such things in his own house, and at my time of life. If this is first-class, give me third."

"But these little inconveniences, Silas, are more than counter-balanced by the—the dignity of our position."

"Dignity be d——d!"

"Oh, oh! horrible! dreadful! Silas, I never heard you—say that—before."

"No, I've never been dignified before. And, Becky, I'm thinking you, or somebody else, will hear a lot more of it yet. I can get on well enough with the men, though they are big swells—lords, and sirs, and generals, and all that big-drum business. It's only now and then that one is cocky, and then I always ask him if he could drive a straight furrow with a plough and drive his own horse. He's dead sure to say no, eyeglass and all. Then I stare at him and say, 'Then I'm sorry for you.' And that settles him. Leastways, I leave him to his own thoughts."

"Are you romancing, Silas?"

"No, on my Bible o—"

"Shh! Then, brother, I will tell you what I think of you."

She rose, threw her arms round her brother's neck, and kissed him.

"There, sir, the man I do that to I am proud of. Ah! I will watch you in future, you delicious creature! I didn't know it was in you, brother."

"What was in me? I'm a bit upset, Becky. I'm not used to that kind of business—not from you, at any rate."

"Never mind. I hope that I did nothing that was disagreeable?"

"Disagreeable! Sweetest kiss I have had for many a day. You know how to do it, Becky; and—it's a thing that wants practice to do it well, Becky; and—I'm thinking somebody, somewhere, somewhen, gave you private lessons, eh, Becky?"

A blush soft and lovely as the tint of a rose dyed the noble womanly face of Rebecca Oldcastle.

"Foolish, foolish man! I thing you are right. Men are easier to get on with than women," she said—to-day. What she would say to-morrow was, perhaps, another thing.

"You see, they mostly know something or other about land; and land's a thing you can always talk about, and its plaguey hard to talk it dry. But the women, the women, Becky—oh, my!"

"Are they really too many for the poor man?"

"Half-naked to start with, you see. With their eyeglasses, their fans, their knowing smiles, their wicked simpers, their little mocking ha-ha's! their swift looks of contempt, their quick gestures of pity, their insolent stares, their movements of condescension, and, worst of all, when I know I've been putting my foot in it, and I am feeling sore and raw, their soft white hand of forgiveness and sympathy with its healing touch! Oh, Becky, Becky! what with the pain they give me—and the pleasure—I could wish they were all—"

"Dignified. Yes, brother, I understand you."

"Do you? I am not so sure of that. I'm not sure I understand myself. It's unnatural for a man to wish his good-fortune at the devil. But I do. I've wished it fifty times within the last six months. There's something wrong somewhere, or I'm a born fool."

"Ware truth, brother, ware truth. 'Tis shy, and apt to kick those who handle it. Still, if I were you, I know what I should do."

"Learn dancing, I suppose, or put up for Parliament, or something else about as sane, eh?"

"No. I think you have too much grass-land."

"Well, suppose I have, what then?"

"I should take one of the home meadows—say, that little secluded one between the woods, just outside the park."

"With the big thorn in the middle of it?"

"That is the one. I should take it and turn it into arable land."

"You would, eh? Now, look here, Becky; I'm just pestered to death on every side of me by you women-folk. But so far you have left me to myself with the land. Now you come with your advice about how the land should be worked. It may be a conspiracy, or it may be nothing more than your natural and infernal instinct to meddle with what you know nothing about. But I'll be d——"

"Dignified, dignified, dignified. Yes, and so you shall be, since you are so set on it. But, please, do not be so ready to tell people what you are going to be in the future. Most of us, I imagine, could make a shrewd guess as to your destiny. For myself, I have not the slightest doubt about it. And, I repeat, if I were you I should turn that particular meadow into arable."

"I wonder, have you got a reason for it?"

"Oh yes; I have a reason for everything. It is a bad habit I have formed; but I was silly enough to think I was copying the men—the most reasonless creatures with reasons imaginable. My reason is this: you could get up every morning at four, as you used to do, and take a couple of horses, and just go and put in three or four hours' ploughing before breakfast. After that, you would find you could hold your own with the ladies, and laugh at them, and perhaps find it less of a hardship to play the gentleman. That's my medicine for a mind—a farmer's mind—diseased. Plough, brother, plough!"

Silas stroked his beard, and gazed meditatively at his sister in silence.

"Suppose I was found out?" he said, at length.

"Then the ladies would be able to laugh as well as you, and so you would be merry all round."

"They aren't early birds as a rule."

"No. You might get it all over by the time they were opening their wicked eyes."

"Blessed if I don't try it, Becky!"

And with that he threw his arm round her neck, saying, "There, I'm proud of you now. Didn't think it was in you, Becky."

She did not object, not a bit. Suddenly she started back, and cried, "Now, what can this libel on a valet want? Look at him, Silas, just look at him!"

CHAPTER XXX.

OF SILAS AS DOCTOR SYNTAX.

THERE stood Gaffer Bucket, his hands flat on his hips, apparently grinning from ear to ear, but in reality laughing within him one of his deep, slow-footed, noiseless laughs.

"To spy marster a-huggin' an' bussin' a ooman, an' her his own sister, an' her Mees Rebeker, haugh! haugh! haugh! Nuf to mak' a mon larf in his coffing, haugh! haugh! haugh!" as he said next day when relating the incident confidentially to Margaret.

Looking at Bucket, Silas saw reflected as in a dim mirror the humor of the situation. He enjoyed it. He enjoyed seeing Bucket enjoy it. He cast a wistful glance at Rebecca—sly, timid, fugitive. His face fell. Her sense of humor was dying, he thought, almost sadly.

"Well, Adam, what is it, my man?" he said, slowly, with a funny affectation of magisterial austerity.

Bucket, who had a shrewd sense of what was what and of when was when, gave a great and sudden gulp and swallowed down his mighty laughter, as a volcano will now and then swallow down its half-ejected lava, and content itself with distant subterranean rumbles. He pulled himself together, and, ceasing to suggest an animal used to all-fours, made a fair attempt at standing erect. The sense of his clothes came back, and as by magic the labor-strung bow of his back was instantly unstrung, and straightened itself out as unstrung bows will. Gaffer Bucket's sense of his clothes was vivid, solemn, overpowering, and majestic. His clothes had become his religion. He lived to justify them. Yet it was no gay livery he wore, no pomp of color, no splendor of trimmings. 'Twas only a suit of sable broadcloth—claw-hammer coat, open waistcoat, and inexpressibles. He looked like a ridiculous butler. He was really the odd man of the establishment. He called him-

self, and insisted on everybody else calling him, the "marster's val-let."

Heretofore the good honest fellow had practised no art with assiduity and success save the art of doing nothing. In that he was a proficient. He could kill time with any man in the county. But now, in the yellow autumn of his life, the old sinner had turned religious, and worshipped day and night with all his heart, mind, soul, and strength his—suit of black. To be equal to it, to be worthy of it, to grace it and not to grease it, was the object of his hopes and the burden of his prayers. At night before getting into bed he said his prayers regularly, after this fashion: he took off his coat, held it out with both hands at arm's-length, gloated over it, laid it reverently on the top of his trunk, patted it, and murmured, "It's my hi-deel, my hi-deel! Lord, how the very thowt on it pinnyates me through an' through!"

On the whole, his new devotion had a beneficial effect upon his character. It enlisted his enthusiasm in the service of order, cleanliness, and self-respect. Moreover, having regard to his position as the master's "val-let," he considered it to be a natural construction of his duty to be as like his master as was possible. He could not, indeed, look like him; but he could, he thought, think like him. To which end he became the echo of Silas. Silas found the ideas and the words, and Bucket instantly adopted the former and echoed the latter. It was in spirit, at least, very much of a reversion to the simple loyal feudal type of relationship between lord and vassal.

Answering the inquiry of Silas, Bucket said, "Ify please, mars-ter, the missis whispered to me to come and telly to come into the house."

"Very well. What does she want me for?"

"Dunno, marster. Howsomever, I was to telly the Countess of Eden has called."

Rebecca (with dulcet irony). "Oh, brother, the Countess of Eden!"

Silas. "Yes, sister, the Countess of Eden!"

Bucket. "Yees, marster, the Countess of Eden!"

Rebecca. (sternly). "What did you say, sir?"

Bucket. (looking surprised and innocent). "Me, Miss Rebeky? Dunno, ma'am."

Silas. "This is social position, Becky."

Rebecca. "Social position, brother."

Bucket. "Social position, Miss Rebeky."

Rebecca. "We had better go in at once."

Silas. "Not if I know it!"

Bucket. "Not if marster know it."

Rebecca (to *Bucket*). "Silence, you idiot!" (To *Silas*) "Do be reasonable, just for once. It would be unpardonable. I have heard much of her. I am quite anxious to see her. She is a great lady, a fine lady, a noble lady. Besides, she is our nearest neighbor."

Silas. "Eh, what's that? Why, their place is a good two miles away. I'm thinking our next-door neighbor lives in that cottage down there by the old mill."

Rebecca (with grave irony). "Silas, do not be ridiculous, please, if you can help it. He is only the village school-master, who lives in that cottage. We do not call people like that—neighbors. Our neighbors—when will you learn it?—are the gentry and—and nobility."

Silas. "Ahem, the gentry and nobility!"

Bucket. "Ahum, the gentry and nobility!"

Rebecca. "You know, their chief seat is in the North—Stramon Court I think it is called. But the Countess, I am told, usually spends part of every summer or autumn down here at Wigwell Grange, the Earl's shooting-box. Poor dear lady, I hear that—Oh, gracious Heavens, if she isn't coming here!"

Silas bounced round in no time, and opened his eyes wide with horror as much as with astonishment. Coming from the terrace, and crossing the lawns towards him, were Priscilla and Margaret and—yes, 'twas she, the incomparable, the adorable, the divine Francisca, Countess of Eden. She is eleven years—older is it, or younger? since last we saw her. She must be about six-and-thirty now, then—bah! Age cannot wither her, nor custom stale. A century hence she might be accounted a lady in years, but just now she has no age. She is simply a woman with a string of adjectival epithets attached to her, long as a comet's tail and beautiful as a rainbow. Here are a few of those found oftenest on the lips of her friends, true and false (for few, if any, care to avow themselves her enemies): wise, witty, learned, fit, able, dexterous, tactic, diplomatic, proud, wilful, ambitious, gentle, sweet, grave, chaste(!), gracious, dainty, exquisite, ripe, mellow, luscious, divine,

unapproachable, haughty, frigid, hospitable, faithful, noble, splendid, grand, and glorious!

Now look at her as she draws near to earth-rooted Silas—a woman whose modesty and native sweetness have survived such a crush of epithets. Her spirit carries them, as it carries her body, lightly, with perfect poise, and the melody, the subtle rhythm, of free balanced movement. Has that woman ever done a thing in her whole life unworthy of an angel? Well, yes, as witness Philip Tuer and David Reed. She is no angel. She is a woman to her finger-tips. And, moreover, we know pretty well the whole extent of her weakness and her wickedness, up to date. But, on the other hand, we do not, nor shall we ever, know anything like the whole extent of her goodness, her suffering, her many temptations, her virtue, her heroic self-denial, her patience, sweet as pity.

Cried Silas, when he saw that his fate was sealed and the Countess was upon him, "I've done no ploughing yet, I've done no ploughing yet, and if this is fair, I'll be—"

"Dignified, dignified, dignified, you awful man!" exclaimed Rebecca, as she thrust her hand before his mouth.

Drew near to him Gaffer Bucket. Said he, in a semi-confidential undertone, "Makin' so bowld, marster, mighten her leddyship be a mite shy at seein' you withouten your integrity?"

He had clung tenaciously to Priscilla's unfortunate word as the polite and proper designation of a certain kind of coat.

"Bless my soul, why, the man is in his shirt-sleeves! What in the world will the Countess think!" exclaimed Rebecca, hastily snatching the coat from the statue.

Silas took it from her, and, casting a despairing glance at the approaching group, who were now descending the steps from the terrace above, essayed to put it on. And now began a modified struggle for life. One sleeve went on all right, but the other all wrong. The lining, as it happened, was unstitched at the top, and Silas got his hand down between sleeve and lining. Rebecca thought he needed a little assistance, he was getting so stout. She seized the coat with both hands behind and lifted it up, while Silas pushed and struggled, got hot and breathless, and began to swear. For a while the lining held out gallantly, but at length it gave way completely at the top, and Silas's hand came through, bringing the lining with it. It was his

right hand, and it was entirely imprisoned in the protruding lining.

Just then Priscilla's voice was heard saying, "Silas, dear, this is the—"

"Yes, yes, drat it! I know all about it. Good-day, ma'am. You are the Earl of Eden's wife, I suppose? I can't shake hands with you, you see. Confound this sleeve!"

He held out towards her a foot of sleeve-lining, in a piteous, appealing manner, much as a beggar will exhibit wounds and putrefying sores. For a moment or two the stately and divine Francisca seemed to be freezing into a solid block of beautiful aristocratic ice, as she gazed in contemptuous wonder at the Squire of Abbot's Hey. But when he held out the sleeve to her she realized the situation at once, and an instantaneous change was wrought in her. She burst out laughing.

"Let me help you with your coat, please," she said, going up to him. Then she added, "Why, you may well feel uncomfortable. Let me help you to put it on properly."

She stepped behind him, stripped off his coat neatly, made a knee for it, by putting a foot on one of the steps of the alcove, and straightened out the whole terrible coil and mess with a woman's deftness in no time.

Priscilla. "Oh, Countess!"

Rebecca. "Oh, Countess!"

Bucket. "Oh, Countess!"

Asked the Countess, with a pretty, curious interest in the matter that took Silas immensely, "Why do you wear such a heavy coat this warm weather, Mr. Oldcastle?"

"It is heavy, isn't it? If you were a man, now, like me, wouldn't you rather be in your shirt-sleeves in your own grounds?"

Priscilla. "Silas, for shame!"

Rebecca. "Brother, for shame!"

Bucket. "In your own grounds."

} Simultaneously.

"If I had to wear a heavy thing like that, I think I should prefer to go without it," answered Francisca, laughing.

Silas turned, and nodding to Priscilla and Rebecca, said, significantly, "There now, there now, what do you think of that?"

Then to Francisca, "Countess, I think you are a trump."

"A trump!" echoed the echo.

"You funny man! I am so glad I have met you. People as

a rule are so very stupid and dull. Now you are making your ladies uncomfortable, I fear; so come, please."

She held out the coat with both hands, ready for him to slip his arms in, and her manner was so gravely arch and piquant that Silas thought her altogether irresistible.

"With all the pleasure in the world, Countess," he cried, chivalrously clutching his cuffs and throwing out his arms behind. The coat slipped as a coat should.

"There, there," said Silas, shooting his arms out in front and pulling himself into shape; "first time I was ever dressed by a noblewoman. Good mind to keep it on for good. It will feel light as a gossamer now, Countess."

"Light as a gossamer," echoed Bucket, grinning.

Looking up Gaffer Bucket caught the eye of the Countess. His placid grin was instantly distorted into a horrible grimace of blank terror, while he retreated backwards some yards. He had never before felt the glance of a woman who was accustomed to the governing and disciplining of troops of servants as much by eye as by mouth. He never forgot it, and, what was worse, he never forgave it. To gather himself together after the shock, he retired behind some thick bushes—out of sight, indeed, but within ear-shot of the group by the alcove.

It was some ten minutes later when Francisca threw her voice out of the feminine circle, and addressing Silas, who had moved a little away from them, said, "Mr Oldcastle."

"Here I am, my lady," he cried, swinging round, and stepping to meet her as she advanced towards him.

"I have a favor to ask of you," she said, with that smile which many a man had found so fatal to his peace of mind.

Silas was not a Cabinet Minister, and had no State secrets to hold with fearful courage in her presence. Still he was conscious of hoping devoutly that she would never ask him for any particular favor with that particular look on her face. For if she did he was a lost man.

Said he, "I'd rather you wouldn't. If it makes no difference to you, I should like us to remain friends."

"Oh, there is no doubt of that, I am sure—especially if you always let me have my own way, and do what I wish you to."

"That's always the way we men have to keep friends with the women. You are like the rest of them, I see, your ladyship."

"No, no; please do not call me that. You really must not 'ladyship' me," she said, with a little laugh.

"Why, isn't it proper?"

"For some people, yes, of course. But not for you, Squire Oldcastle."

"Oh, I see. Well, what shall I call you? What's your name?"

"My name is Francisca. Call me Countess. You funny man."

"I would much rather call you Francisca, but perhaps Priscilla wouldn't like it."

"Probably not. Now I want you to grant me a little favor."

"Well, I never knew that granting favors was the way to fasten friendships. But if you think there is no special danger in it—and I should be mighty sorry to quarrel with you, Fran—Countess—I will try it this once, to humor your sweet self."

"Silas! Please do not forget yourself!"

'Twas the voice of Priscilla. And Silas looked guilty.

Not so the Countess.

She looked archly at Silas, and then threw a sympathetic glance towards Priscilla, as she exclaimed, "Isn't he a dreadful man! I am sure he needs looking after, Mrs. Oldcastle. Now, Mr. Oldcastle, listen to me, and do not be frivolous. You know where our land joins yours—the corner of the park yonder?"

"By that avenue of big beeches?"

"Yes. Just beyond, you know, outside the park, there is a pretty little cottage covered with honeysuckle and ivy."

"Yes, I know it. Pretty enough, but lonely."

"You are right. It is very lonely."

"Struck me it would suit a philosopher at loggerheads with the race."

"One like Diogenes, I suppose, who coined base money and then became a cynical philosopher," she said, with a merry laugh.

"Never heard of him; though I reckon he must have had a good constitution."

"Why?"

"Because so many of his descendants still flourish."

The Countess looked at him, and her eyes twinkled. She was not afraid of a pinch of salt.

Silas added, "I hope that old gentleman there isn't one of the tribe?"

"Oh, dear, no. It is of him I wish to speak. I knew him

and his daughter Janet years ago, when they lived in the North. He is a very respectable and worthy old man," said Francisca, and she gave a deep sigh.

"I've seen the old gentleman a few times. He looks like a man broken with trouble."

"Yes, he is just that—broken with trouble. I take a great interest in him—in both of them. Confidentially, I may say they are my pensioners." And again she sighed deeply.

"Any one with half an eye could see you had a kind heart," said Silas, sighing with her out of sheer sympathy.

"For some years now old Mr. Reed—that is his name—has been in the habit of walking daily along the beech avenue. He loves it. Your predecessor allowed him even to put a wicket-gate between the garden and the park. I promised Mr. Reed some time ago to get your consent to the arrangement. He was afraid you might consider him in the light of a trespasser."

"Trespass! Bah! But I saw him only a few days ago, and told him to consider the avenue as part of his own property."

"Oh, did you? Then I am too late, except to thank you. That is my duty and my pleasure. It is exceedingly kind of you, and I am sure—"

"Now, come, if we are going to remain friends, don't talk like that. I don't call it particular kindness when to do the opposite would be particular cruelty. You are not going yet, are you?"

"I must, really. I have stayed a most unconscionable time."

She turned to Priscilla and said, "You will come and see me soon, will you not? And bring that dreadful husband of yours with you, mind."

"Have you named the party to her, Priscilla?" inquired Silas, in an audible whisper.

"Yes; I know all about it," laughed Francisca. "And though it is such a long way off, I have promised to come. Such lovely grounds you have for a garden-party!"

"Well, we shall be glad to see your sweet face on that occasion."

"Silas!"

"Nonsense, wife! I'm old enough to be her father. She is not a goose. Are you?" he said, turning to Francisca.

"No; but some say I am a fox, I believe," she laughed, as she moved away, accompanied by the ladies of the family.

As Silas stood ruminating, Bucket drew near from his retreat hard by. He wore a puzzled look.

"Eh, Bucket, if I were a young unmarried man in search of the picturesque, like Doctor Syntax, do you know what I'd do?"

"Dunno, marster. Give it up."

"I'd make straight for the Countess. Ha, there goes her carriage! A bonnie woman, Bucket, a bonnie woman."

But Bucket paid no attention. He scratched his head and passed on, murmuring to himself, "Francisca . . . Janet . . . Francisca . . . Janet . . . mighty queer, sparrer-hawk, mighty queer!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF A FLASH OF WIT.

COWP had promised Mr. Digby Roy to take some long tramps with him and see the beauties of the country lying about Abbeystead, together with its famous antiquities. His visit to Peakshire, however, had necessarily delayed this. So, when, on the morning following his return, he made his way to the cottage on the common, he thought it necessary to make some apology for not turning up sooner.

"I have been away for a couple of days, or I should have been here sooner," he said.

"Oh, have you? I did not know," answered Mr. Digby Roy, who had scarcely given the matter a thought.

"I was afraid you would think it queer of me. I might have kept you in-doors."

"Not in the least. Fact is, I was away from home myself yesterday. Hope you enjoyed yourself?"

"Yes, first-rate," answered Cowp, and nothing more was said on the subject.

Once or twice he was on the point of referring to Peakshire, but he restrained himself. His reason for this reserve was natural enough. He had come to England to learn, under peculiar circumstances, the identity and personal history of his father. The secret, whatever it was, that lay buried in Abbot's Hey

church-yard lay upon his mind like a dead weight. He had no desire to speak of Abbot's Hey, or even Peakshire, to any one.

Their walking expeditions occupied nearly a week. They saw the famous old churches, abbeys, halls, and parks; the way-side inn that dated—one of them, at least—from the time of Falstaff; the Roman ruins, the sacred wells, the pools and trout streams where the monks used to argue so persuasively with sturdy carp and lusty trout. To Cowp all this was delightful. It satisfied his historical instinct. It fed him with just the food for which he hungered. It was an honest appetite and an honest feast. The two men got on very well together, and learned to like each other. Only, Cowp took Mr. Digby Roy exactly as he found him, whereas Mr. Digby Roy made a quiet and unobtrusive, but still a close and searching, study of his companion's temperament and character.

Said Mr. Digby Roy one day, "Sha'n't you be a bit lonely, knocking about all by yourself?"

"I hope not. When I begin to feel lonely I shall fish out my letters of introduction, and leave them one or two at a time," answered Cowp.

"Oh yes, to be sure. If you have good introductions, you will be all right."

"I have eight or nine to different gentlemen. One or two noblemen among them, I believe. Of course they are all strangers to me, and somehow or other I feel a little shy about intruding myself upon their notice."

"I wonder you haven't met a lot of them over on your side."

"I have met plenty of English in society, of course. But they are under no obligations to me whatever. Indeed, the only man in England I really know is Lord Eden."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Digby Roy; "do you know the Earl of Eden?"

"Yes, pretty well. I met the Earl and Countess in the States three years ago. We happened to be travelling together. Afterwards they came and stayed with me nine or ten days. Do you know them?"

"I used to, years ago. The Countess better than the Earl. Deuced singular that you should know Francisca, Countess of Eden."

"A charming woman, don't you think?"

"Divine. Adorable. Spend a summer afternoon looking into her eyes, as I have done, and then see if you don't wish to goodness that she were either better or worse than she is."

"I dare not hope for such a privilege. I thought she was the most attractive, the most fascinating woman I ever put eyes on."

"Such a woman ought to be public property. No one man ought to own her."

"You don't mean, of course, that she is—that her reputation is not good?"

"Her reputation? I believe her reputation is perfect. I am surprised, all the same, that it is not scandalous."

"You don't mean it, surely?"

"What I mean is, she is a woman whose favor would confer honor on any man. She is just one of those women about whom many a truthful man would lie like the devil. Not to scandalize her, but to gratify his own vanity. Men have, as a matter of fact, lied about her. But, as luck would have it, it did no harm in particular."

"Simply because they were not believed?"

"Just so."

"Every woman is not so fortunate."

"You are right, by George! There is many a woman to-day classed as being no better than she ought to be, who is as innocent as a dove. And what is better, she hasn't the faintest idea of what her reputation really is, especially among the men."

"Can a woman have two distinct reputations, then?"

"I have known women who were considered as models by women, and by men they were spoken of as being little better than—models."

"Not both were true."

"No; honors were easy. Sometimes the women were right, and as often as not the men. What did you think of the Earl?"

"What I saw of him I liked. I have heard since that he is a bit of a rake. Is it true, do you know?"

"No; decidedly false and misleading."

"Ah, I am right down glad to hear it. He seemed cut out for a nice sort of a fellow. I could hardly believe—"

"Don't mistake me. You asked me if it was true that he is a bit of a rake. He is not. It is a libel on him. He is not a bit—he is a whole rake."

"I want to know! What a pity, with such a splendid woman for a wife!"

"Perhaps he is mending. Looks almost like it, for him to have his wife with him on his travels. Are you sure it was the Countess?"

"Not in the least. I only know he called her the Countess, and she passed as such. Do other ladies ever travel with him?"

"If a lady is seen with the Earl, the presumption is that she is not his Countess. What a joke, though, if he passed off one of his gay friends as his wife!"

"Don't see it at all. I should call it a piece of infernal impudence. And I should tell him so, you bet."

"Are you going North to see them?"

"Well, I didn't think of doing so till the autumn. But after what you have told me, I think I will alter my plans. I have a great desire, now, to see the Countess of Eden," he said, and there the subject dropped.

During all this time Mr. Digby Roy was in a state of perplexity. His mind was in a fog, and just when it was most desirable to have a clear outlook he found himself enwrapped with mists of doubt and hesitancy. He could elaborate no definite plan, he could form no settled purpose. The problem was, of course, how to use Cowp to the best purpose. He wished him at Jericho. But he was not at Jericho, or any other dumping ground of superfluous and inconvenient humanity. He was at Abbeystead. The fact had to be faced, and like a practical man Mr. Digby Roy faced it. There was unquestionably a measure of danger in Cowp's presence, especially in a world with an eccentric liking for the development of the unexpected. But why might not the stress introduced by his presence into the situation be utilized in some way for the furthering of Mr. Digby Roy's designs? With wit, with promptitude, with energy and courage, he felt sure that the thing was possible. He was able to supply all the necessary qualities, he thought, unless it was the wit. He cursed himself a hundred times for a muddle-headed fool.

At last, like a flash of light, there came a gleam of wit. It seemed to cut the mists asunder, roll them back, double them up, suck them up, and devour them. What a beautiful thing was wit! It transformed his dull, low-roofed, cavernous mind into a glorious heavenlike dome, clear as crystal and full of light. His

veins tingled with a fearful joy; for his thought was a very bold one: it was daring, it was finely audacious. He fell in love with it at once and for good. Its complexion, its spirit, took him strongly. There was nothing tame about it, nothing meanly cunning. It would either make him or mar him; and if he won, it would be by brilliant audacity. Put into a nutshell, his thought was this—take Cowp down to Abbey's Hey and— He stopped there dead. A tumult of images surged through his mind. He caught their features in a flash, but he entertained them not; rather he hurried them on. He was content not to scan them as yet too closely. When he wanted them he would summon them, and they would come. His blood burned.

The two men were standing near the cottage, about to part after a long day's tramp, when Mr. Digby Roy said, "By-the-bye, I am running down into Peakshire in a day or two to visit some friends of mine. They are very pressing for me to go. Lovely place. Hills, dales, moors, woods, everything in that line. I like that kind of thing myself. Do you?"

"Yes; nothing better."

"What do you say to running down with me for a few days? They would be delighted to see you."

"I should like it immensely, but—"

"Nay, let there be no 'but' in the matter."

"I am a total stranger, you see."

"You are my friend, and that's enough. English custom, my dear fellow, English custom. I shall write and ask the hostess for permission to bring an American friend with me, just as a matter of form. But there is no reason to, I assure you. Everything depends on one's footing, you know. I know them very well."

"Then I put myself in your hands. If you think there would be no impropriety in—"

"Not in the least. I am glad I thought of it. Regular jolly time. I shall introduce you as a friend of mine, an old friend of mine from the States. I think I told you I have been in the States?"

"No, indeed, you didn't. I am glad to hear it. How long is that ago?"

"Oh, four or five years ago. I was knocking about there for a year or two."

"Is that so? Ranching?"

"No, nothing in particular. Travelling about, and flirting with your charming women."

"You found them so, did you?"

"I did. I think them just too nice for anything, especially when they are a bit wicked."

"I hope you didn't find many of them that?"

"Oh no, not many, you may be sure. That is their chief failing—they are too good. The proper blend is one of vice and virtue. In the right proportions the result is exquisite."

"But the right proportions are everything, eh?"

"Yes, everything; therein lies the charm, the art, the secret. Your women that have it, have it to perfection, the sweet things!"

"Oh, come, I must go, before I hear worse things."

"Then it is settled? You go with me."

"Yes, I suppose so. It is awfully kind of you."

They parted, and Mr. Digby Roy stood a while, and watched the retreating figure of Cowp.

"Now I must go and drop a note to Madame Sans-Sans, and let her know we are going down. I do not know, but I have a grim suspicion that the tide of my affairs will be at the flood ere long, and, so taken, I shall be led on to fortune. I feel as if Providence were dropping ripe cherries into my mouth. I must beware of the stones, though, lest one choke me and I die."

On his way to the "Peahen" Cowp debated with himself the wisdom of the project to which he had consented. On the whole, it seemed a convenient and pleasant arrangement. Under any circumstances he would have to be at Abbot's Hey in a week or two. Meanwhile he would get initiated in a degree into that delightful mystery of English home-life in the country, which every American has a very natural and pleasing curiosity to penetrate and understand. He found himself wondering how far it would be from where Mr. Digby Roy's friends resided to Abbot's Hey. He would have asked where they lived, but that he thought the question would seem an aimless one for a man who was supposed to know nothing more than the name of the county.

Already the reserve which he had imposed upon himself began to gall him. He was naturally of a frank and unsuspecting nature, unaccustomed to reservation or subterfuge. His training and position had strengthened this original openness of disposition. He would have found it difficult to conceive another set of

circumstances powerful enough to impose upon his proud and fearless spirit the unwilling yoke of reticence. But, somehow, the secret of his father's identity, coupled with the nameless shame alluded to by his father, infused into him a peculiar sensitiveness that seemed akin to timidity. For the first time in his life he shrank from thrusting the whole of himself forward. For the first time in his life there was a part of himself, and it seemed the very eye of his soul, which sought for safety in retirement.

But he found comfort in numbering the days. They were reeling themselves off beautifully. They would soon be gone. And then—then an end forever to this episode of uncourageous reticence. Every night he pulled out of his trunk and examined almost fondly—a spade. And a wonderful spade it was, the work of American ingenuity. It was very light, entirely of wrought steel, in three parts, easily fitted together, and warranted to dig a hole into the middle of creation without bending or breaking. With that he was going to dig up something infinitely more precious than gold. That spade became very dear to him.

Man is naturally a hospitable creature, and entertains, not always unawares, angels and demons, with admirable catholicity of taste. He finds room for both the comic and the tragic, and throws together as birds of a feather the sublime and the ridiculous. In this respect Cowp was very much of a man. Side by side with the procession of solemn and sombre images that moved ceaselessly about the central figure of Harold Crook, a crowd of laughing, dancing, free-limbed images went round and round the radiant figure of Dorothy Blackwall. The bells were always ringing, marriage peal and funeral toll, funeral toll and marriage peal. He thought of the girl a good deal. And the more he thought of her the better he liked her. She had "sat on" him terribly, he thought, at that meeting in the park. But he forgave her, for the sake of the sweet wickedness of her eyes, the pretty proudness of her dainty mouth. Would she have gone back to college? he wondered. If not, he would see her. If he saw her he would speak to her, he would tell her—what?

CHAPTER XXXII.

OF THE UNEXPECTED, AND HOW IT HAPPENED.

COWP had put himself, metaphorically, into the hands of Mr. Digby Roy, and that gentleman a few days later, metaphorically, carried him down into Peakshire; by the aid of metaphor one can do very curious things. The journey down was pleasant; and, as luck would have it, during the last dozen miles or so Cowp was so entertained by his companion's vivacious narrative of some experiences and adventures out West that he paid not the smallest attention to the striking scenery through which they were running.

The train was drawing up at a way-side station, and as it moved in front of the platform, a porter bawled out, "Ipstuns, Ipstuns, Ipstuns-under-Watter!"

"Holloa! here we are at last," cried Mr. Digby Roy, jumping to his feet and seizing hold of his traps.

As for Cowp, he started as if he had been shot. He could scarcely believe his eyes or his ears. Thanks to the attraction of the divine schoolmarm on his previous journey, it was a question whether he would have recognized the country again, even had his attention not been held by his companion's lively talk. But there, right opposite the open door of the carriage, was the very lamp to which the station-master had pointed, as showing the name of the station as large as life. And there, as he followed Mr. Digby Roy out, was the station-master himself, who recognized him, smiled, touched his cap, and said, "Good-day, sir; hope you are well, sir? Your luggage is all out, sir."

"Thanks, thanks," murmured Cowp, who was struggling vainly to form an idea as to where they were going to, so near to Abbot's Hey.

Said Mr. Digby Roy, with a laugh, "He's a queer stick. Grinned at you and chattered as though he had known you all your life."

"The courtesy of the native. He evidently knew me for a foreigner," responded Cowp.

"Pretty sharp-sighted, then. You know, they say of the natives, 'Strong i' th' arm and thick i' th' head.' I guess that is our team coming yonder," said Mr. Digby Roy, dropping quite easily into American phraseology.

Up came a wagonette and pair in fine style, driven by Silas, who just now looked every inch the squire, and handled the ribbons to perfection. In a trice the groom was at the horses' heads, and Silas was on the platform.

"Glad to see you, Mr. Roy. Sorry, half a minute late. Priscilla's fault. I didn't spare the horses. They had to run for it. Welcome, sir, welcome; and—oh—ah—yes, this is your friend, is it? I hope you are well, sir? Right down glad to have you with us. Take us as you find us, and welcome is the word."

"You do me great kindness, sir. I could almost fancy that I heard the accents of Sir Roger de Coverley himself," said Cowp, who really meant what he said. Silas looked well in his eyes, sounded well in his ears. Earl, baronet, or country squire, he knew not which he was. But he did seem just then and there to embody no little of the brave old English gentleman, all of the olden time, as Cowp had pictured him.

Another minute and they were off, with Cowp on the box beside Silas. They took the road to Abbot's Hey. Cowp seemed to remember every yard of the road. A mile ahead there was a road to the right, with a finger-post on a patch of greensward in the middle of the road, like a delta at the mouth of a river. At the foot of the guide-post was an old mile-stone with one shoulder higher than the other, whose mission in this world was to inform ignorant mortals that it was one hundred and thirty-four miles to London, neither more nor less, travelled they by coach-and-four or on Shanks' pony. Outwardly calm, yet inwardly excited, Cowp fixed his eyes on the finger-post as the last emblem of his hopes. They would turn off there, he thought. He was quite certain they would. He bet himself five hundred to one they would, and he staked half a million of dollars on the hazard. The post seemed of a sudden to run to meet them. They were going at a splendid trot. His eyes were on Silas's driving-hand. He watched every movement of the fingers. Suddenly, Silas lays his other hand on the reins—yes—yes—they bend—they

curve—they—no! There is a nasty rut to be avoided just there, that is all. And away they go at a spanking rate straight for Abbot's Hey. And if Cowp had not been himself, he would have lost half a million dollars in sixty seconds.

He had never once asked the name of his host, and he had not caught it at the station. But now he looked hard at Silas, as if there had been an off-chance of nature having writ his name upon him in capital letters.

"Yes," he said to himself, "there is no doubt about it. That open, healthy, well-bred, squirely face spells Oldcastle; and he lives at the Hall. And for all I know, it was at the same Hall where my father passed those happy days of childhood. If so—"

Involuntarily he glanced again at the Squire's face.

"No. It is a good face, but it is not a whit like mine; and mine, they say, was like my father's. Still, he might be a blood relative, for all that. Odd, odd beyond all telling if it was so—there, there, what rot it is! If I don't exactly act, I think the fool, like one to the manner born. I guess my father lived with the miller, or with some farmer. Like as not, at Rakeway Farm. Come to think of it—strange—never struck me before, but Dorothy, sweet Dorothy Blackwall, might very well have my blood, or rather my ancestor's blood, in her veins, to judge from her face. There was something of the crook in it, I'm thinking. Hang the Hall! Rakeway Farm forever! Down, cad, down!"

And all the time that this inward argument was uncoiling, Cowp kept up a steady flow of not uninteresting conversation with Silas.

"I suppose you have never been in this part of the world before?" remarked Silas.

Mr. Digby Roy, the breeze being favorable, heard the question distinctly. And quite as distinctly he heard Cowp's answer, which was, "Do you get any sleighing here in the winter?" Which inspired Mr. Digby Roy with the reflection that the gods who overlook and overhear the whole must surely crack their celestial sides with laughter at the absurdly funny things of life. He himself smiled, but with no facial muscles, only with the muscles of the mind. In another ten minutes all doubt as to their destination was at an end as concerned Cowp, for they entered the park and drove up to the big pile of yellow brick-work, and passed under the gate-way into the court.

A little later Cowp was alone in his chamber. He stood in the middle of it, and surveyed it with something of wonder and awe. He had never seen such a room before, even in imagination. He was quite familiar with the modern antiques as found in the States, but he had now to learn that these modern productions were mere pinchbeck compared with the genuine originals. For splendor and luxury, his own room at home was kings and queens to this one. But his room was the product of money; given money, and the like was at the command of anybody. This room, however, though it unquestionably at first and at last stood for money, stood for something more, and more precious. Gold could not reproduce it; and, by the same token, there was embodied in it a limit to the ambition and the insolence of gold. It was that subtle and spiritual quality in the chamber that smote on Cowp's soul so strongly.

He was an American, he was a millionaire, and we know, most of us, what he ought to have been, exactly. Do we? I fancy not. Cowp was no fool, no fanatic. He had a fair share of the cool, shrewd Yankee wit. He knew the value of money: how it augments the senses of the individual; how it multiplies his ideas; how it infinitely strengthens his muscles; how it magnifies his virtues; how it charts his vices; how it conceals the idiot, the brute, the devil in him; how it reveals the sage, the saint, the angel in him; how it invests him with a superstitious halo, and evokes on his behalf the deference, the submission, the willing servitude, the servility of his fellow-men—he knew it all, profited by it, did not feel that it was his mission to preach a new order of things, did not recognize it as his duty to forego advantages that were secured by his wealth, though they could not be claimed by right, nor defended by reason. To this extent, and much further, he was a very ordinary creature, a fair type of the conventional Dives. But he had what—I hope I do the gentleman no wrong, for he is a friend of mine—Dives does not as a rule count a necessary item of his possessions—a soul. In this, blame not Dives. Why should he who has gained the whole world desire to be troubled with an item which, if he had (we have it by implication and on really good authority), under the circumstances he would be extremely liable to lose?

Not as a man with a million of money, but as a man with a soul, Cowp was much taken with the haughty argument of his

chamber. It was exceeding large, with three long lancet-windows, and a fourth, a latticed bay, filling up nearly the whole of the top of the room, and reaching from floor to ceiling. There were wardrobes built into the walls, with huge doors, black, and glistening with the elbow-grease of generations of chamber-maids; an alcove, the size of an ordinary bedroom, separated from the rest by a screen of wooden columns, and lined with wood-work, richly carved; a mantel-piece boldly carved, showing the group of the Laocoön, the priest above the fireplace, a son on either side, the serpents coiling round them; near the fireplace, a kind of ambry with a superb bronze door wrought into a lively picture of the Queen of Love's encounter with inert Adonis. This seemed a fair set-off against the Laocoön piece.

The bedstead was a solemn and noble edifice, impressive as a royal tomb, tent-like, lofty, and approached by three shallow and wide steps that extended along the two sides of the bed. Cowp ascended them slowly with some dignity and with more caution. He sat on the bed and murmured something about a certain great sovereign known to history as Old King Cole. He descended with great stateliness, arrived safely at the bottom, stalked like Hamlet to the middle of the room, and gazing with introspective eyes at the grimly splendid bed, soliloquized, "For me or not for me? That is the question."

He fell to and dressed for dinner. He sat in the great window, that must have contained at least two hundred diamond panes, all leaded, and had a glorious outlook. His eyes outran his thoughts; for while the former wandered over hills and dales, woods and waters, the latter tarried at home, and took their exercise under the roof of Abbot's Hey. He came to the conclusion that, on the whole, he was rather glad than otherwise to be at Abbot's Hey. He saw no reason why it should inconvenience him if he acted with circumspection. It was pleasant, at any rate, to be in a house which, under any circumstances, must have enriched the memory and touched the imagination of his father.

It would have been altogether pleasant but for the reticence which he had allowed to surround the fact of his former visit. It would seem rather late in the day, he thought, to refer to it now, the more so that it would appear to call for an explanation which he was not prepared to give. He could frame a reason other than the true one for his visit, of course, but he felt any-

thing but confident of making a neat job of it, even if he began it. Moreover, what moral gain was there in launching a white lie merely to avoid a reticence which he was under no moral obligation to disavow? So he argued, and his judgment supported his argument; but something more than reason is required to settle a matter whose roots are not in reason only, but also in sentiment. To come to close quarters, Cowp felt that he had done wrong less than he feared that Mr. Digby Roy would think that he had done wrong. So that in this little moral tempest there was not only the lightning of conscience, but also the muffled thunder of personal self-esteem. It was ethics *plus* egotism—a combination that is responsible for much of the world's best conduct, and that is interpretative of many of the world's best characters.

A shaft of red light entered obliquely, struck some carved panelling in the recess, and discovered all aglow a small, strange, semi-human face. 'Twas exceedingly sad to behold, and bespoke the deep depravity of the old-time carver, but a finger—a tiny, wicked forefinger—lay against the nose, and the mouth was cut into a smile ironically malignant. All this seemed to be done in Cowp's honor. He stared at it, then laughed, then sighed.

"You queer little devil, what's up with you? Where do you come from? What's your name? Your business, you man-imp? What are you grinning at me for like that? Have I been fooled? Fooling? Whom? Yes, grin away, you demon-mannikin! Rare fun, eh? Whom, I say? Myself? Myself? You—"

The red shaft of light suddenly vanished, and with it the face. Cowp rose to his feet. He was going to examine the wood-work, but he turned away without doing so.

"No, I won't kill the effect; for once I won't be a fool." Then he went down-stairs.

There was no one in the drawing-room except Rebecca, who looked extremely well in her silver-gray poplin, her old lace and jewelry, and, above all, her large, noble, womanly face. She came forward half the length of the long room to greet the stranger-guest.

"You are Mr. Cowp, I presume? I am Rebecca Oldcastle, Mr. Oldcastle's only sister, and he tells me he is glad he has not another like me."

"He means, of course, that he is glad to be able to lavish all his brotherly affection upon you."

"Yes, I think that is his meaning, though he is not gallant enough to make his meaning clear. I hope you will enjoy yourself while you are here, though they tell me you are to occupy the state chamber."

"You speak as if that might interfere with my enjoyment."

"I confess I was a little doubtful."

"Why so? Is there a ghost in it?"

"Not that I know of, though I should not be much surprised if there were a hundred. If I am ever a family ghost, and you wish to find me, look there, sir."

"Thanks, thanks; I am sure I should be very happy to meet you, even as a ghost."

"Very prettily said, sir, and I thank you. I am afraid that, being an American, the room might be too much for your imagination. For though you cannot, I suppose, boast of many, if indeed any, such-like antiquities, I am given to understand that you are not lacking in the apparatus for appreciating them—nerves and imagination."

"I suppose that is so. Still, I think I shall be able to survive my chamber."

Then he told her of the red light and tiny impish face.

She laughed as she answered: "Oh, that is only one of many minor attractions. Live in it for a month, and do not be afraid to use your eyes, and you will discover things that ought to astonish. I spent— Ah, here is my wicked niece, Margaret Oldcastle. Let me introduce you. She is my pet and my tyrant."

Following her glance, Cowp saw entering the room a vision of loveliness, tall, graceful, arrayed in sweeping folds of light-blue silk, with a fluttering of delicate lace that offered a delicious half-view of her bosom, on which lay a diamond pendant—Rebecca's gift—that flashed and gleamed as it rose and fell—a pretty sight, thought Cowp, as he raised his eyes to her face. As he did so he gave a great start. It was the divine schoolmarm herself!

CHAPTER XXXIII.

OF A SPECIAL TAP OF HOME-BREWED.

"Is it possible?" stammered Cowp, who saw a good many things in a moment of time.

"His Grace the Duke of Cape Cod, I believe," she said, courtesying to him with the dignity of a duchess and the gravity of a nun.

"Duke!—Duke of Cape Cod! What does the girl mean? Would you whet your giddy wit on a stranger-guest, Margaret? For shame, child!" said Rebecca, somewhat severely.

She had old-fashioned notions, had Rebecca, and would have preferred in her niece Margaret something more maidenly, to her thinking, in the presence of a total stranger, than cool and ironical self-possession.

Said Margaret, while her color deepened and a bewitching look of wickedness stole into her eyes, "Will your Grace explain, or shall I?"

"I don't know, I am sure. Perhaps you had better begin, and if you break down I will strike in and make the running," answered Cowp, who had pulled himself together, and done a lot of rearranging of mental furniture to meet the new and unexpected situation.

"Then, to begin with, dear aunt, kindly remove your veil."

"My veil! Goodness gracious! are your wits clean gone from you, Margaret Oldcastle?" cried Rebecca, almost angrily.

"No fear of that, dear. My wits are too slow-footed to wander far. By veil, I mean that terrible look of painful surprise blended with severe reproach. Dear aunt, it is the very worst kind of a veil you could wear. It is worse than green net. It kills the glory of your face."

"You foolish child! What in the world will Mr. Cowp—"

"There, there! now I see the unveiled glory!" cried Margaret, giving Rebecca a dainty kiss on each cheek.

Rebecca's face was tinged with a soft, delicious, womanly blush; and Cowp thought that, for a mature woman's face, it was altogether the noblest, richest, strongest he had ever seen. She looked the ideal wife and mother; adequately painted as such, she would have made the fortune and the fame of the painter. And she was a spinster! Yet, having not received the crown of matrimony, she was nevertheless a queen. And by the same token, not all that wear crowns are queens.

Continued Margaret: "Mr. Cowp told me that the people of Cape Cod, where he lives, call him the Duke of Cape Cod."

"Oh, indeed! And pray, when did Mr. Cowp tell you all this? I did not know that you had ever seen him before," said Rebecca.

"We are almost old friends, aunt. I travelled with him in the train the last time I came from Peakton. Then I—"

"Yes," broke in Cowp, "I was coming down to spend a few days in your celebrated county, and I met Miss Oldcastle in the train. Of course, I did not dream that I should ever have the pleasure of meeting her on these pleasant terms. That is a happiness I owe entirely to my friend Mr. Roy."

"You are old friends, then, I presume? Ah, talk of the—"

Just then Mr. Digby Roy entered the room.

"I didn't mean that exactly," added Rebecca, in an extremely dubious tone. Then, "And to prove it, I must go and greet him."

She moved down the room to meet him.

Said Cowp to Margaret: "I want to say something to you. Let us go and look out through yonder window at the end of the room."

"With pleasure," answered Margaret, "though Mr. Roy may think it funny of me, as I have not yet spoken to him. It does not matter, though, if he does."

She moved forward.

Said Cowp: "I will explain everything to you when I have time, Miss Oldcastle, but I do not wish any one to know that I have ever been to Abbot's Hey before. You have not told any one?"

"Oh dear, no."

"Then do not, please. I was afraid you were going to tell your aunt just now."

"So I was."

"I am glad I stopped you, then. Shall we go and join our friends?"

"One moment, please. Does not Mr. Roy know of your visit?"

"No; he only knows I have been somewhere in Peakshire."

"And you are close friends?"

"Well, hardly that. I have only known him since I arrived in England."

"Really. From his letter to mamma we thought you had known each other a long time—were near and dear."

"Oh dear, no. Nothing of the David and Jonathan business, I do assure you. I had doubts as to the propriety of my coming down with him; but he persuaded me it was all right, as you are old friends of his."

Whereat Margaret smiled, and very peculiarly, thought Cowp.

"Papa and mamma are delighted to see you, I am sure. Do not have any doubts on that head. Now we will go."

They turned from the window, and as they came down the room she said: "I am glad it is not a modern version of the rather foolish old romance of David and Jonathan."

"Is that so? Then so am I. But why?"

"Oh, I have not time to explain. Still, I should have been sorry to hate you," she murmured softly, and then she broke into a most sweet laugh, which sent the first dreadful pang of jealousy through Mr. Digby Roy. She never laughed like that with him.

Watching him, Rebecca saw a strangely unpleasant expression come into his face. It lingered only for some moments, but it led Rebecca to remark, in a half-confidential manner, that the two young ones were getting on with each other very well. The remark seemed to irritate her companion. A heavy frown crumpled his brow.

To soothe him, she added: "They have met before, it seems; and, judging from appearances, they are not sorry to meet again. I like to see young people happy."

"Met before? When? where?" exclaimed Mr. Digby Roy, in something like a fierce whisper.

Rebecca gave a little wicked laugh, and, moving towards the couple, said, with her voice well up, "Mr. Cowp, here is a gentleman in the exclamatory mood. I tell him you two have seen each other before to-day, whereupon he grows fierce, and demands when, and where. I give him over into your hands."

A quick, involuntary glance passed between Cowp and Margaret, and Mr. Digby Roy caught it. And like an electric discharge the blended currents of rage, hatred, and jealousy swept through his spirit, filling it with a passionate, surging energy for which there appeared to be no adequate outlet. He would have liked to anathematize Rebecca and pulverize Cowp. He stood very near just then to the barbarian man, in his mood; and had the circumstances been favorable for a curse and a blow he would have sacrificed a kingdom. Luckily, the circumstances were not favorable.

The conventionalities fell upon him like a silken net, enmeshed him hand and foot and tongue, and held the savage man more firmly than with gyves of brass. Since he could not act himself out frankly, he must needs dissimulate. At such a moment to dissimulate artistically and successfully was no easy or paltry piece of conduct. It required a moral effort which, under other aspects, would have worn a look of heroism. And centuries of civilization sent their forces to the field and flashed into a brilliant climax and triumph, as Mr. Digby Roy came forward with a pleasant smile and a deep, mellow laugh, and said, as he shook hands with Margaret, "You don't know how happy I am about it! Surprised, of course, but delighted. You must really tell me all about it, you know."

"Oh, we met in the train a short time ago. Mr. Cowp was daring enough to make himself agreeable to me. And I had sufficient hardihood to keep the conversation from running into silence, like a fox to earth. Of course, if I had known that he would be coming here, I should have done the proper thing, and snubbed him for his impertinence in trying to make himself an agreeable companion instead of a stiff mummy."

Said Cowp, "I am sure I did not know I was doing anything daring. It is what I should do at home, and I—I—"

"Oh, if you begin to apologize I shall denounce you and demand an apology. Still, I think our English custom of travelling, like so many surly bears, silent, reserved, proud, and timid, is really funny. Don't you, Mr. Roy?" said Margaret.

"Certainly; the thing may be carried too far. Still I cannot say that I much care for the hail-fellow-well-met kind of behavior that one is subjected to pretty often from total strangers when travelling in the States," replied Mr. Digby Roy, with the air of an impartial critic.

“Still, to be free—oh, it must be delightful! Especially to a girl, an English girl. Yes, Mr. Cowp, I give you my promise: I will go to your dear, delightful country just as soon as I can save up enough out of my pin-money to pay my passage,” exclaimed Margaret, with a proud, wilful toss of her head that both men thought bewitching.

Nothing further was said on the subject of Cowp and Margaret's previous meeting. But Mr. Digby Roy claimed the ever-blessed privilege of thinking his own thoughts. These, whatever they were, seemed to have none but a beneficial effect upon his deportment. He laid himself out to please; and when he chose to make himself agreeable, he succeeded beyond the best efforts of most men. He could turn himself with exquisite ease from a man's “right down good fellow” into a lady's “very fascinating man.” Cowp, unconscious of rivalry, did not seek to emulate his brilliant companion, but took him quietly as he found him, and thought himself extremely lucky in having stumbled across such a capital fellow.

Mr. Digby Roy was not unobservant of Cowp's inertness and seeming indifference. He put it down to the insolence of wealth, and credited him with weighing his dollars against brains and manner. This was natural enough, for two things strive ever for the mastery of this earth—namely, gold *versus* wit. Each would have of the other, and having not, each hates the other, and together they strive like darkness and light. But Cowp was no apostle and champion of gold, for the reason that nature had given him a fair endowment of wit—just enough to spoil him for the insolence and worship of gold. With yet a little more wit, mayhap, he would have set a greater store by his dollars, seeing that dollars are wits in the raw.

For a couple of days everything at Abbot's Hey went swimmingly. Host and hostess were delightfully hospitable; Rebecca put off her war-paint, laid aside her fighting gear, and, distaff in hand, became the model of a grave and gracious spinster. Margaret was sweetness incarnate. Cowp seemed to make no effort at all, with mind or body; he was fairly active, and was entertaining enough; still, he seemed like an athlete lying on the warm sand and taking in pleasure lazily, through open pores and half-closed senses. Not so was Mr. Digby Roy. He was alert, tense, strenuously and brilliantly alive. He was making the running in

splendid style. He knew it. He felt it in every fibre of his being. Margaret smiled on him like a goddess—the heavens were open and the earth was beautiful.

On the third day an incident occurred. It was afternoon—a fine June afternoon—and Margaret and her two cavaliers came down the hill leading from the church to the smithy and the mill beyond. They were on horseback, and Margaret looked her best. Just as they neared the “Blacksmith’s Arms,” the blacksmith himself appeared, standing in the smithy door-way, where he favored each horse and its rider with a frank, open look of critical approval. He touched his cap to Mr. Digby Roy with formal deference. He repeated the operation to Margaret with a pleasant “Fine afternoon, Miss Oldcastle.” But as he touched his cap to Cowp a broad, jolly smile of recognition broke up his face, and he sang out, “Glad to see you, sir. Hope you are well, sir?”

“Thank you,” responded Cowp, “I am—”

Just then, answering a sudden sharp touch of the spur, his horse gave a violent start, reared, and plunged forward with an angry snort. Cowp gave him his head, and galloped some distance before he pulled up and came slowly back to meet his companions.

“What could have startled him so? I never knew him to act like that before,” cried Margaret, with some concern.

Cowp laughed, and said, “Oh, his thoughts were troubling him, probably.”

“Perhaps he resented the familiar manner of the blacksmith,” observed Mr. Digby Roy, looking hard at Cowp, who slightly flushed, and said, “I don’t quite catch on.”

“Wouldn’t any one have thought, Miss Oldcastle, from the grin on his face and the tone of his voice, that the blacksmith was recognizing an old friend, so to speak, rather than a total stranger?” said Mr. Digby Roy.

“Well, you know,” answered Margaret, “Mr. Cowp has—”

She checked herself just in time, while the color mounted to her cheeks.

“What?” inquired Mr. Digby Roy, carelessly.

“They say the smith keeps a special tap of home-brewed ale that is quite famous about here. And I have also heard that gentlemen sometimes drop into the ‘Blacksmith’s Arms’ just to satisfy their curiosity on the subject. Am I libelling you, Mr. Cowp?”

"Not in the least. The brew is first-rate. I have tried it."

"And you meant to keep it a secret, eh, my dear fellow? Now don't you call that a selfish piece of conduct on his part?" said Mr. Digby Roy, appealing to Margaret.

"Perhaps the tap is getting low," she suggested.

"Well, I must go and see for myself. And yet," he added, after a momentary pause—"no; I do not think I will. I will discover another famous brew elsewhere, and win the good-will of a jolly Boniface, and let out not a word about it."

At which there was a general laugh, and the subject dropped. But Margaret tasted a distinct flavor of acidity in Mr. Digby Roy's remarks, and the flavor lingered. As for Cowp, he felt less of a man than he had done for many a day. This concealment and evasion and subterfuge evoked within him a feeling of self-contempt. Yet how to get out of the ridiculous bog now he was unable to determine.

The incident had a remarkable effect upon Mr. Digby Roy. It made him feel extremely thirsty. It was a thirst that neither the waters nor the wines at the Hall could assuage. After dinner he strolled about the grounds a while, alone, and smoked a cigar, and seemed to surrender himself to the influences of a scene of almost magical beauty, in the subtle interblend of twilight and moonlight. He had complained of a headache. Presently he found himself in the shrubberies with the house hidden from view. He took off his cap, passed his hand over his brow, and fixed his glance on the pale, splendid moon. Poet or lover at the least he looked, though he was as distant from love or poetry as a stock-broker brooding over Mexican rails. The thought occurred to him that nothing on earth could quench his thirst like a draught of the famous tap at the "Blacksmith's Arms." He played with the thought for some little while, and then he worked it, with the result that ten minutes later he entered the inn.

The landlord met him in the sanded passage, and seemed no little surprised as he recognized him, and, touching his cap, said, "Good-evening, sir."

"I am feeling a little thirsty, and I understand that you keep a famous tap here. Am I right?"

"Not far wrong, sir, I reckon. Step inside here, sir, and I'll get a candle in a jiffy," answered the blacksmith, throwing open the door of a little parlor, into which Mr. Digby Roy took a

couple of steps, with a murmured "Thank you," and stood still, for the room was not only quite dark, but smelled stuffy. The landlord quickly reappeared with a couple of lights in two tall, slender, old brass candlesticks.

"I will open the window, I think. The room is a bit close," said Mr. Digby Roy.

He suited the action to the word, and stood for some moments at the window, admiring the old-fashioned garden outside, from whence the night air came up laden with sweet odors. The window was at the side of the house, with the road on its left on the other side of the low, well-trimmed hedge of holly. Mr. Digby Roy was, of course, in evening-dress; and so, in the moonlight, seemed to be some one else to a person passing alongside the holly-hedge. Seeing the light in the room and hearing the window open, the new-comer halted, stared, backed a few paces to get a better view of the window, rubbed his eyes, and stared again.

"Well, now, if that binna sparrer-hawk, I dunna know a toad-stoo' from a mushrum. Now, what's he doing here? I thowght he was at wum on the balcinny wi' th' rest o' th' crowd."

A minute later and Gaffer Bucket was hidden from the road behind a thick clump of honeysuckle, with his ear within a foot of the open casement.

The landlord brought in a pint-jug foaming with the famous brew. He filled a glass and handed it to his guest, who held it up with the candle behind it, and seemed satisfied with its color at least. Then he drank it, slowly and critically, the landlord watching the operation with an expression upon his face that suggested anxiety as much as satisfaction.

"Well, sir, and how do you find it?" he said, as Mr. Digby Roy looked silently and solemnly into his empty glass.

"My friend—the gentleman, you know, who was riding with us to-day—said that— By-the-bye, is this the same tap you supplied him with?"

He held out his glass to be refilled as he spoke, which was no little comfort to the landlord, who said, as he filled it, "Yes, sir, just the very same. When Mr. Cowp—I think he said that was his name—was staying here, he just drank that and nothing else the whole time."

Mr. Digby Roy stared open-eyed at the man for some moments, then he exclaimed, "The devil he did! Is it possible!"

“Possible? Isna it good enough? The gentleman was only here two nights, but if he had been here two years there ’ud have been no occasion for him to growl at liquor like that,” answered the landlord, deeply incensed.

“I think you mistake me. Growl at liquor like this! Why, it is the finest stuff I ever tasted. It seems incredible that you should be willing to supply strangers with it at all. And he drank it, you say, for three days?”

The landlord laughed now, not loud, but deep and long.

“Thank you, sir, thank you, sir, for your good opinion on it. I’m a bit proud on it, I own. It isna to be beat, not in this county.”

“Will it keep long? It is about a fortnight ago since Mr. Cowp was here, I think?”

“Fortnight to-morrow since he left. But, God bless your heart, sir, keep! Keep a hundred fortnights and then drink like strong wine. Have another glass, sir?”

“Not any more, thank you. It takes a pretty good head, I fancy, to carry much of that. I must drop in again if I can count on getting served as well another time.”

“An’ welcome, an’ welcome. You shall always have the best in the house. Always glad to serve gentlemen staying at the Hall. Fine gentleman the Squire, sir. Hard to find a nicer-spoken gentleman than Squire Oldcastle in the county. Good-evening, sir, and thank you.”

Mr. Digby Roy went slowly homeward in no enviable frame of mind. To the taste his thoughts were hot and bitter. It is a sad thing to lose confidence in one’s friend, and yet more sad to lose confidence in one’s self. Both of which sorrows Mr. Digby Roy was now undergoing. He had been so confident of Cowp—beautifully, touchingly confident of his frankness, his sincerity, his simplicity, not to say his gullibility. But now it seemed the dupe was no little of a duper. He was subtle, not simple. Under cover of an affected openness and blandness of manner, lay a reticence dark and sinister. This discovery of the real character of Cowp was bad enough in all conscience, but Cowp’s conduct was even worse than his character; while the terrible darkness and uncertainty of motive and reason that enshrouded both character and conduct merited the deep destruction to which Mr. Digby Roy consigned them.

It was this darkness and uncertainty that was the great rock of offence. What did it all mean? What did Cowp know of Abbot's Hey, unless he also knew that his father, Harold Crook, was none other than Conrad Twigg? If he knew that, he knew he was his father's heir. He knew everything, or very soon would know everything, and then—then the game was up. No; it was not possible, it could not be possible, Mr. Digby Roy told himself over and over again. And yet—what brought him to Abbot's Hey? Why this secrecy, this mystery? It meant something, and something extraordinary. He was in a perspiration, and yet Mr. Digby Roy felt at intervals a cold shiver run through him.

He stood on one of the terraces and gazed down into the dark shrubberies below him, and he felt as if that darkness down there were perdition and he upon the brink of it. He drew back with a shudder, and said in a half-tone, "I must force the pace now, though one of us breaks his neck."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

OF A TALK BETWEEN REBECCA AND MARGARET.

It was the afternoon of the following day, and Margaret was just putting on her riding-habit when Rebecca came suddenly into the room, dressed for out-of-doors.

"What a pity it is you don't ride, aunt! It would be so nice to go out together."

"You mean when you had no one else to go with you, I suppose," said Rebecca, the look in her eyes belying the tone of her voice.

"I mean that I would rather go out with you than with any one else, unless it be papa. He growls all the time, and you sting. But you are both harmless; and I suppose I like you for your qualities," cried Margaret, with pretty impudence, as she took her aunt's face in both hands and kissed it.

"You are a piece of baggage."

"Without an owner. Ah, woe is me!"

"I pity the poor creature that should ever own you, Miss Witwould."

"So do I, if he is really a poor creature. Such an one could have no right to me. He must have stolen me some way or other."

"I am not so sure of that. You may be picked up, like any other piece of lost finery."

"Well, I shall not have been bought and sold, at any rate, like a thing of merchandise. To have escaped that luck will be something."

"When a thing is valuable only for what it is worth, perhaps good-luck does not lie in being picked up, but in being sold and bought."

This time Rebecca won. The thrust was home. Margaret flushed, and the tears filled her eyes.

"Cruel, cruel!" she murmured; and the next moment her head was on Rebecca's bosom, and she was sobbing like a child, while her aunt stroked her hair and kissed her brow, and crooned over her, and loaded her with abusive epithets steeped in tenderness, the curious irony of love. She knew that Margaret knew that it was naught but a game of tongue-fence they had been playing. Yet the woman found it sweet to pretend that the girl had been in real battle and was wounded, just for the pleasure of soothing her, and healing her, and holding her to her heart, a soft, pliant mass of tenderness. We like to feel the loved one hang upon us; the weight of the burden is the strength of our love. Love is selfish. It should be painful to see the loved one weep, but—is it? Does not the pleasure of kissing away those tears outweigh the pain of seeing them?

It is not marriage nor child-bearing that creates the maternal in a woman. It is rather her womanhood. Now, Rebecca Oldcastle had no husband and no child, but she had a glorious stock of womanhood. The maternal juice was strong within her; but, like all other forces whose natural channels are blocked, its struggles to express itself were apt to assume singular, not to say eccentric, forms.

Said Margaret, presently, "I suppose I had better go now. The gentlemen will be waiting for me."

"You are not going riding this afternoon. You are going with me for a walk," answered Rebecca.

"I don't like to disappoint them, aunt."

"You will have to disappoint them or me. Which is it to be?"

For answer Margaret doffed her habit and rang the bell, and sent word down to the gentlemen that she would not be able to accompany them. A little later the two ladies left the house.

"Where are you going?" asked Margaret.

"Only into the park, child. I want a quiet stroll and—talk. Do you object?"

"Not in the least. Both will be delightful. What are we to talk about?"

"The first animal we come across."

They entered the park at a point not far from the highway, which lay below them. All at once they heard a great squealing, and looking down they beheld a villager driving a pig along, with a string tied to one of its hind feet.

"There is our topic of conversation," said Rebecca, striking across the park towards the remoter parts, where privacy was absolute.

"But there are two animals," observed Margaret.

"Yes; I choose the less commonplace."

"The man?"

"By no means. The pig."

"Suppose it had been a woman instead of a man?"

"That would have been perplexing. The less commonplace would not have been so obvious. We should have had to debate the point. I have a high opinion of the pig, Margaret. It has suffered much at the hands of mankind. Trusting to its dumbness and gentleness, they have traduced its moral character sadly. Men love fables, and care more for point and epigram than truth."

"And you think they have rammed the pig with the e-pig-ram," said Margaret, with reckless courage.

"You barbarian! But since you have brought it from afar, we will let it pass. I was about to remark that fabulists and proverbial philosophers have seized upon the pig, and gibbeted him as a type of the unclean."

"Whereas, you think they ought to have roasted him, eh?"

"Before they condemned the pig, they should have examined closely its master. He, having small dislike of dirt, leaves the pig to wallow in it. And then because the animal sinks like his master's kind to its surroundings, and having neither soap nor wa-

ter, broom nor besom, must needs make the best of a bad case, he calls it unclean. He who has not washed his own body for days, weeks, months, years! The pig is naturally a clean animal, Margaret."

"Well, aunt, I don't object. Indeed, I am glad to hear it. I only wish the evidence were a little stronger."

"I dare say you think that is the beginning and the end of his virtue?"

"Oh no, not at all, aunt, I assure you. I consider the end of his virtue is—good bacon."

"There again, what an injustice! We have celebrated the Roast Beef of Old England, but who sings the praises of the universal breakfast dish—the Broiled Bacon of Old England?"

"I know one who does—Mr. Cowp. He said it was like a revelation to him."

"I dare say; but Mr. Cowp isn't everybody. He is half a foreigner. But let me stick to the pig. Alone of all animals, I believe he resembles man in having a strong sense of humor. What do you think of that, child?"

"I think it very—humorous."

"I had a pig once that could actually laugh."

Whereat Margaret laughed.

"Yes, Margaret, as truly as you laughed then. He used to come up quietly behind me, and when he had startled me, as he often did, he would run a little away and just laugh at me."

"What an awful animal, worse than a conversational donkey. If Mr. Cowp—"

"Mr. Cowp, Mr. Cowp. Your brain, child, might be furnished lodgings let to Mr. Cowp. He seems to live in them. Ah, you blush! Well you might. What do you think of him?"

"I think it is a more important question, What do you think of him, aunt?"

"He would probably disagree with you there."

"Because he does not know your value, dear."

"Good gracious, you are not such a goose, child, as to think that he is—is thinking of me?"

"Ah, ah, you blush! Well you might," laughed Margaret.

"Ah, you little unregenerate imbecile! Seriously, though, I wish to know what you think of him."

"Thank you, dear. It is the first time you ever suggested that

my opinion was more valuable than your own—though I always thought it was, you know.”

“And knowing your weakness, niece Margaret, for once I flatter you. What say you?”

“He has only been here three or four days.”

“Oh, you wise-looking goose! As if any man had three or four days of stuff in him! Three or four days of meaning! In three or four hours the best man that ever wore shoe-leather I would explore and—explode. And what is more—he has done that with you.”

“Explored me? Indeed, he has not,” declaimed Margaret, lifting up her head and voice like a tragedy queen.

Answered Rebecca like a sibyl, “Oh yes, he has. Considered as an island, you are to him no longer a mystery or a terror.”

“I should hope not, indeed. A terror!”

“But that is only because, being a brave man, he is superior to fear when confronted by danger.”

“Poor me! I suppose my personal climate is fatal to American constitutions?”

“Well, yes. It is exceedingly bad for the heart, my dear.”

“Aunt, if you were eighteen, I should box your ears. What will you say next, I wonder,” said Margaret, averting her face, which she felt was burning.

“This, child. Don’t you see that Mr. Cowp is falling—no, not falling—jumping deliberately into love with you?”

“He looks, I must say, like a good jumper. If I were a man, I often think I should go in for athletics.”

“Yes, yes, very neatly done, niece Margaret; you excel in pretty pieces of flippancy. And I dare say you fancy it is very fine having two strings to your bow. But I—”

“Two strings to my bow? I do not understand you, dear,” replied Margaret, grown suddenly serious.

“Ah! then I will enlighten you. One string—I confess the figure is a little obscure, owing perhaps to its antiquity. But I am not responsible for it, and I find that it is not necessary for a figure to be properly understood in order to be popular. Then, one string is Mr. Digby Roy, and the other—”

“I hate him,” broke in Margaret, with a toss of her head.

“I don’t know which you refer to—whether to Mr. Digby Roy or ‘the other.’ Grammatically, it would be ‘the other;’

but grammar, I know, is almost as foreign to affection as is logic."

"You know very well which I mean, aunt. Why should I hate the other?"

Rebecca laughed softly; then she said, "Note this, niece: I have been present at three, and only three, weddings in my life. Strange to say, in each case the bride had confided to me, at some earlier period, that she hated the gentleman who subsequently figured as her bridegroom. Moral—"

"I won't hear the moral," cried Margaret, passionately.

"Is it a case, then, of a burnt child dreading the fire?"

"Oh, aunt, aunt, don't! If you love me, don't! I would rather die than marry him!"

There could be no mistake about it; Margaret was terribly in earnest now.

"Then that settles it. You are your own mistress—though your dear, stupid mother may try to make you forget it. I don't know, but I am afraid there will have to be a battle-royal fought yet, before we settle Mr. Roy and your mother."

"You will stand by me, aunt?"

"Well, if I didn't, who would? Your father is made by nature for an umpire. He will not take sides. He will let others do the fighting, and he will watch, and finally announce what every one knows—which side has won. Yes, child, when your father and your mother forsake you, then the Lord and your aunt will take you up."

And once again, being all secluded, Margaret's proud, pretty head was pillowed on her aunt's bosom, for she felt just then more like crying than fighting. "You like him, don't you, dear child?" half-whispered Rebecca, presently.

"I don't know, aunt. How should I?" murmured Margaret.

"He has not spoken to you, then?"

"Not a word."

Rebecca laughed low to herself.

"I fancy he thinks he has spoken volumes. I am sure he has felt them. But I am glad, very glad. You must be on your guard, you must be careful, child. You see, we really know nothing about him. He might be an adventurer for all we know."

"Oh, I am sure he is not that. Do you not see that he is a

true gentleman?" cried Margaret, disengaging herself from her aunt.

"In manners, yes. Your true adventurer always is. But how do you know that he is what he says he is? Mr. Roy has only made his acquaintance lately, I understand. Though that perhaps is in his favor."

"He told me yesterday that he knew the Earl and Countess of Eden."

"Indeed?"

"Yes; they stayed with him when they were in America. They wouldn't have done that if—"

"Did you tell him that we knew the Countess?" asked Rebecca, with some eagerness.

"Yes. Why?"

"That she had a seat near by?"

"No."

"That she was coming to our garden-party?"

"No."

"You are quite sure?"

"Quite sure."

"That is singular. How do you account for it?"

Margaret laughed, and said, "Oh, you may be quite sure that if I did not brag it was no fault of mine."

"Which frankness is honorable in you, my child, honorable or—shameful. I am not sure which. But your reason?"

"Mr. Digby Roy joined us just then. Said Mr. Cowp, 'What do you think, Roy? Miss Oldcastle knows our friend the Countess.' Said Mr. Roy, half-closing his eyes, 'Really?' This was to me, and I said, 'Slightly. Do you know her?' 'Slightly,' he answered, stiffly. Then silence fell on us, and very quickly I left them. And for the same reason did I not brag."

"I am very glad indeed you did not. Don't you say a word to either of them about her being in the neighborhood, or of her coming to the party."

"Very well, aunt. That will be no difficult matter to avoid. I question if her name will be mentioned again."

"I shall be much surprised if it is not. However, we must keep them both here till the great day arrives, and then they shall see her face to face."

"And what then?"

"Perhaps we shall learn something. Who knows? Tell me, what was Mr. Cowp doing here when he put up at the 'Blacksmith's Arms?'"

The color suddenly flamed in Margaret's face.

"Ah, you traitress! You see I know all about it. Answer me."

"I do not know," stammered Margaret.

"Then do your best to find out, Miss Conspirator. Do you know why he wishes to keep his visit a secret from Mr. Roy?"

"No, I do not, I am sure."

"You are very ignorant, I must say. But you may tell him, confidentially, that Mr. Roy knows of his visit. Yonder are the Reeds; let us go and speak to them."

CHAPTER XXXV.

OF DESTINY WITH TWO ARMS.

THE long and lofty drawing-room at Abbot's Hey was in a state of semi-illumination. There were three or four lamps here and there, and half a dozen large wax tapers in silver sconces. But these feeble bodies of light were unable to do much more than render visible the intervening masses of gloom. The head of the room would have been quite dark, but that nature for the nonce had undertaken to light it, which she did with some effect, by hanging the round white moon right in front of the beautiful oriel-window.

Up the room, and dimly visible in a heavily shadowed nook, sat Silas with his chin on his chest, fast asleep. In another section of the room lower down, where the light was most brilliant, and where couches and chairs and tables and a crowd of little luxuries seemed to have grouped themselves into a separate and more domestic existence, Rebecca sat reading and Priscilla knitting. A long, narrow door with a pointed top suddenly opened beside the oriel, and Mr. Digby Roy entered the room. At the same moment Rebecca rose to her feet, and wishing Priscilla good-night, left the room. Mr. Digby Roy began to thread his way

through the gloom and among the many pieces of furniture towards Priscilla. We will pass him unobserved while in that zone of heavy shadows near the massive mantel-piece, and make our exit through the same arched door that gave him entry.

On a stone balcony in front of the window, with a crenellated parapet, were Margaret and Cowp. She sat in a low arm-chair with big rockers, and on her bare shoulders was a lovely Indian shawl, whose threads of gold and silver glinted in the moonlight. He leaned against the parapet, with an elbow on one of the merlons, and looked at her sweet face with its ever-changing expressions, and wondered to himself if she would ever sit with him on one of his own broad verandas on Cape Cod, and look out over the blue-green waters of the Sound with those dear, beautiful gray-brown eyes so full of soul. He was even foolish enough to think that the American moon, the moon of his childhood, whose pale radiance fell on wide waters and limitless prairies and mighty mountains and vast forests stretching to the sea, and everywhere was greeted by some human eye and touched with the ache of exile some human heart—this moon, this wondrous moon, he thought, held sweet influences unknown even to the memory-girdled moon of Old England. How it would work its way into her eyes and face! How it would awake her sentiment, and, under his embrace, stir the deep waters of her passion, evoking as by magic the supreme, the terrible, the glorious full-orbed soul of her womanhood! And the awful sweetness of her passion would be his! Small wonder that he was in love with the American moon.

At present she sat there glancing often at the ineffectual English moon, now and then rocking herself for a few moments, carrying on with feminine skill a quite pointless conversation, and yet managing to beautify the empty bubble with the prismatic colors of wit and sentiment, but herself, he thought, all this while absolutely unstirred. Calm, innocent, passionless—a model English maiden. So he thought. And she, noting his easy attitude, his softened, insouciant manner, the marvellous skill with which he fashioned geometrical figures from the smoke of his cigar, the indolent ease and complete indifference with which he made remarks that were wise and remarks that were foolish, as though the distinction between wisdom and folly were of too slight a nature to interest any but a professional philosopher—noting all this,

and many other things too small and subtle here to be set down, yet not too small and subtle to strike the imagination and color the judgment, Margaret thought he was the very embodiment of unimpassioned, easy-going good-nature.

She liked him; yes, she liked him exceedingly, but— The girl was divinely ignorant. Manhood was a strong-bearded fascinating mystery. Some day, perhaps, she would hold it by the beard, and it would kiss her, and mayhap with the kiss she would steal its secrets. Such theft she was prepared to commit; she thought it would be rich fun. At her own womanhood she cast many a curious and tender glance. Somehow, she quite loved it. It seemed a thing to be loved. But she did not understand it much more than she understood manhood. She would have liked to see it unclad, in the open sunlight; whereas there were always trailing mists about it, billows of golden haze, clouds of lace, soft and delicious, that rose and fell and hid now the face and now the form.

Underneath all ignorance, however, there lies knowledge. Like ether it pervaded her world of being. She was steeped in it—as we all are. In virtue of this, she knew more than she knew, which is as one should say that she felt more than she could express. She felt that there was that in her which could become strong and hot in love; and that something would demand its like. Would he ever, she wondered, grow angry? Would he ever rise up and fight? Could he wax fierce, impetuous, imperative with love? She did not know it, but she was really wondering whether or not he had passion in his nature. Which was very much what he was thinking of her, with a difference. Just now there was a singular community of thought and sentiment between the two, though how it had been established was more than either could tell. He knew that he was rushing on to his fate. And the knowledge made him nervous. Doubting his own judgment, he was afraid of success, and, yet more, of defeat. She, also, knew that her fate was upon her, and, like him, she was afraid. She was not sure that she understood his character aright, though deeper down she felt she did. Then again, her conversation with her aunt in the park had fettered her. She felt herself hardly a free agent. She had to play with her destiny until after the garden-party.

Meanwhile, as if to demonstrate the contagion of ideas, Mr.

Digby Roy was just remarking, as he seated himself near to Priscilla, "I have left the young folk to themselves, in order that we might have a little quiet chat together. You know, my dear madam, that like to like is the true order of things. Ripeness to ripeness, wisdom to wisdom."

And the satire was so softened by compliment that Priscilla felt quite flattered, and could not help thinking—which was quite true—that the gentleman had a most taking manner when he wished to be agreeable.

Outside, the "young folk" had not spoken a syllable since the departure of Mr. Digby Roy. She rocked slowly to and fro, with her eyes now on the white round moon, and then on the tops of the woods below her and stretching uplands beyond. He smoked on in silence, occasionally following her glance, more frequently studying her face. At length he broke the silence with the standing offer of "A penny for your thoughts, Miss Oldcastle."

She gave him a smile worth many pennies, as she said, "Why waste your pence? You told me at dinner that you were a mind-reader."

"Ah, you misunderstood me. In the first place, I do not pretend to be able to read a mind until—well, until I have first found out what is in it."

"I see now," she answered, with mocking gravity; "you know a thing when you have learned it?"

Said Cowp, laughing, "Yes, that's it exactly. Then, again, there is the precious doctrine of affinity. I cannot find out what is in a mind unless it resembles my own."

"Which means, I suppose, that you know your own best?"

"Precisely. To illustrate. If you had certain thoughts about me, and I had similar thoughts about you, the chances are that we should understand one another."

She laughed sweetly as she said, "And would that be an advantage?"

"To me, yes. May I dare to ask you a certain question, Miss Oldcastle?"

As he spoke he threw away his cigar, which seemed to bespeak something serious. His tones were deep and earnest. Unquestionably her destiny was upon her. And the girl felt thrill after thrill go through her.

"Certainly," she answered, rising instinctively to her feet, as for self-defence. Which movement intimidated her interrogator not a little. He would rather have faced a battery in full play than her refusal.

So the question that had risen was thrust aside, and in its place he said, "I may be wrong, in which case I hope you will forgive me; but from something Mr. Roy said this morning I inferred that—that he had some kind of claim upon you."

"Some kind of claim upon me? I do not understand you."

So, after all, it seemed her destiny was not upon her; it had slipped aside. And the passing of the delicious terror was, perhaps, responsible to a degree for the proud poise of her head, and the proud, cold tone of her voice.

"I inferred that he entertained some hopes, shall I say, of winning your hand?"

She gave a proud toss of her head, while a little fierce, ironical laugh broke from her.

"Ah, thank God! It is not true, then—say it—say it in words?"

He moved close to her. He touched her with his hand. His touch shook her like a strong electric shock. The delicious terror smote her swiftly, suddenly, so that her brain swam.

"It is not true. Never, never. Speak not of it, please. We had better go in."

His hand fell from her arm to her hand, which he held firmly; and the prisoner made no fight for liberty.

"Not yet, not now. Oh, how I love you! how I love you, dearest!"

The next moment destiny with two undeniable arms was upon her, and she felt herself pressed close to the fascinating strong-bearded mystery. Of course, she ought to have stiffened her backbone, and repelled the monster with freezing—or hot—virginal indignation. But she did not in the least. On the contrary, she yielded—a soft, warm, palpitating thing, sweet as an odorate bush of flowers.

Oddly enough, it never seemed to occur to Cowp that it would be in order to discover the nature of her sentiments towards himself. Instead of asking her if she loved him, and getting her to repeat the sweet syllables a thousand times o'er, he contented himself with pouring upon her a heavy shower of pieces of impas-

sioned eloquence, ejaculatory, interjectional, and expletive. He bombarded her with precious chunks of inspired speech; petted her, as it were, with the golden ornaments and precious stones of the language of Love. And with something of kingly magnanimity, he sought no costly *bonbon* in return.

And Margaret, thrilling, trembling, in an ecstasy of delicious sensation, forgot all about her talk with her aunt. "Yes, I do—," she murmured, and then she stopped, while something like a cold shiver ran through her. She remembered her talk with her aunt!

She withdrew herself from her lover, and putting up her hands, woman-like, to rearrange her hair, said, "We have no right to be doing this. Do you know what you have done, Mr. Cowp?"

He laughed, like a hero after the fight, "Yes," he said, "I think I do. I have been wooing the sweetest girl on earth."

"But you ought not to have done so," she said, with delicious gravity.

"Indeed; I had the opportunity. Do I need further justification for the act? You darling!"

He made an impulsive movement, but she checked him by moving away a little.

"When are you going away?" she asked, suddenly.

"I don't know now. I thought of going the day after to-morrow, but I do not think I shall now. Why?"

"I thought you were going to stay over the garden-party?"

"Well, your mother and aunt were good to press us both to remain, but I did not think I could very well. Now, however—"

"You will stay—will you not? Promise me?"

"You wish me to?"

"Yes; very much."

"Why? Because you—"

"No, no, not that. I don't—I must not—till after then," answered Margaret, with some confusion of manner.

"I don't understand you a bit. What is it?" inquired Cowp.

"Nothing—at least nothing that I can tell you. It will be all right after the party. I have perfect confidence in you."

"Am I not to say anything to your parents, then, till after this wonderful party?"

"No, indeed, no; not a word to any living creature. You ought not to have done it."

"But suppose any one saw me kissing you?"

He saw the color flame in her face, as she answered, "But no one will. You must not do so again."

"What! live one—two—three—four—five days without kissing you! No, not five minutes, not five seconds."

It was no use. He was very strong and self-willed, and would have his own way whether or not. And she, what could she do, the soft, warm, feminine thing!

"I think you had really better go to-morrow," she murmured, like one who felt that it was a hopeless case. But she knew very well that he would do nothing of the sort.

"No, no; not now. Mentally I have unpacked my trunks, and I intend to remain. Besides, if I went away to-morrow, I should have to come back again the day after—on business."

"On business?"

"Yes; but that is a little secret of my own, which I trust you with only because you are—my own."

The words sounded sweet as sweet music in the girl's ears, and yet they brought to mind the one thing that was at all mysterious and unpleasant about her lover. She looked at him earnestly for some moments, then she said, "Do you mind telling me why you first came to Abbot's Hey?"

"I came on business," he answered, with some deliberation, after a pause.

"Business—in this out-of-the-world place?"

"Yes, private, personal, secret business."

"Ah!"

"That word 'secret' I am afraid rather alarms you. It suggests Fenianism, conspiracy, assassination, and—"

"Oh, don't please. I do not like secret business."

"Sweetheart mine—nay, protest not—thou art sweetheart mine, I say—thou wert no woman didst thou like secret business. I wish I might tell you all, but I cannot now, I cannot."

He sighed deeply, which was the very best thing he could have done; for people sigh over misfortunes, not over crimes. And it is no crime to feel sympathy with misfortune, though the misfortune be ever so secret and unknown. Margaret sighed, therefore, in sympathy, and murmured, "Poor fellow!"

"I will tell you now, if you wish it," he said. Then he added, "Though I would rather not. I could not tell you everything

yet, and I would rather wait till I could. I will tell you after—the party.”

“You told me you did not wish Mr. Roy to know of your visit.”

“Yes, that is so. If I had known beforehand, though, I should have told him. I mean if I had known that we were coming to stay here.”

“He would think it strange if he learned of the fact now, would he not?”

“Why, certainly. That is just where it is. Positively, I don’t know how I could explain my silence to him, now.”

“I am very, very sorry, because I think he knows already.”

Cowp started slightly, and thrust his hands suddenly into his pockets.

“Why do you say that? He cannot know it.”

“Aunt Rebecca told me.”

Cowp opened his eyes.

“Oh, indeed. Then she knows, too? Do you know how this has come about?”

“I think he got some inkling of it, and went down to the inn, and—”

“Oh! oh! oh!”

It was a cry of suffering, followed by what sounded like a suppressed scream. Startled, they stood listening for a moment. Then they heard the voice of Silas calling, “Madge, Madge, come here, quick!”

And Margaret rushed in, followed by Cowp.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

OF THE QUARRYMAN OF PIUPETAW.

“THE fact is,” said Mr. Digby Roy, as he drew a chair and seated himself near Priscilla—“the fact is, I want to have a chat with you.”

“Shall I wake Silas?” she asked, wishing very much, now it was too late, that she had followed Rebecca out of the room.

“No. Let him sleep the sleep of the just man who has had a good dinner.”

"It is a very bad habit he is getting into. He might be a farm-laborer worn out with toil."

"He would, perhaps, be happier if he were. His wealth does not seem to yield him much of the magic of happiness, I fear?"

"He makes me almost cross with him. I tell him he does not deserve his good-fortune."

"There is one bright spirit, at any rate, who revels in the sunshine of prosperity."

"Yes, indeed; I am as happy as a princess. I knew it would come sooner or later. Ah, Mr. Roy, you do not know what it is to have the dream of your life realized—to see your fond, bemocked faith justified by solid facts."

"No, I confess I do not—though I hope to. It must be the supreme felicity of life, and granted only to a few, and to those only who have deserved it."

"Oh no, I cannot say I have really deserved it."

"Modesty is always beautiful, especially in the successful. Only the noble can dream noble dreams, and cling to them as higher truths in spite of probability and—and reason. To be divinely mad is the prerogative of all genius, whether intellectual or moral."

"Ah, but I was not mad."

"But all who knew you thought you were, which amounts to much the same thing."

And the daring insolence shaped itself so cunningly into an argument of praise that Priscilla's chastened and spiritual face wore a smile of complaisance and amusement.

"We won't talk about that any more. I think I shall soon be able to forget all about it. I think when any one is in their element it is only natural for them soon to forget that they were ever out of it."

"Why, certainly. The most natural thing in the world. Else how could the new people persuade themselves that they are old people, as so many of them do?"

"I didn't mean that exactly. I meant—"

"Oh, I know that, of course. You did not mean it, but I did—exactly. Do you know, dear lady, I think that nothing is harder to be borne than the sight of happiness you cannot share."

"Yes, perhaps so," she answered, slowly and deliberately, like one giving an assent to a solemn truth.

"In its lower aspect, as illustrated by inferior natures, the feeling engendered is identical with the envy of moralists. I am no moralist, thank Heaven. I leave that role to gentlemen whose personal wardrobe of virtues is threadbare, and who, naturally enough, are anxious to apparel themselves finely at the public expense. What I was going to say is, what in a low nature may be envy, in a higher nature may be nothing else than sympathy. A strong, imaginative projection of sympathy, leading one to desire earnestly to share in another's happiness, and, by inference, to share also in that which is the source of the happiness. Is it not so?"

"Yes," said Priscilla, with a soft laugh; "I can imagine that a vulgar sentiment strained through a refined nature might acquire something of refinement."

For a little while he looked at her with a curious expression on his face, but she would not meet his glance.

At length he said: "I suppose we are all more or less the victims of selfish prejudices. We are all apt to give hard names to beliefs we do not share, and especially to sentiments that seem to assail our personal interests. And that, I think, is the true vulgarity of mankind. By-the-bye, do you not think that I am entitled, Mrs. Oldcastle, to some sort of explanation regarding Miss Oldcastle?"

"What—Rebecca?"

His laugh was hard and metallic as he answered: "No. I appreciate Miss Rebecca Oldcastle sufficiently not to desire closer personal relations with her. I refer to your daughter and to your promise."

"And what do you wish me to say?" inquired Priscilla, with a sudden sinking at her heart and a feeling of utter helplessness.

"Oh, if your difficulty is simply one of words, I can supply them. Say, 'Mr. Roy, you may marry my daughter this day three months, with my consent and good wishes.' That would entirely cover the ground, dear madam."

"Please don't be so— You are jesting," answered Priscilla, rallying a little.

"I am not foolish, nor am I jesting. Jestings? Was your promise, then, a jest?"

"No, of course it was not. But do be reasonable, Mr. Roy. Since then many things have happened."

"That is true, but they were not jests. Is this noble old house a jest? This estate, this ample rent-roll? It is you, madam, who jest, not I."

"I really don't know what you mean," said Priscilla, with a little half-hysterical titter.

A dark cloud settled on the face of Mr. Digby Roy. She was, it seemed, inconsequent, impracticable, ungrateful, and false, he said to himself. He had done—what had he not done for her? He had done his part of the bargain, and now she wished to repudiate hers. She had gained everything, and he was to gain nothing.

"Mrs. Oldcastle," he said—and every word seemed cased with steel—"I mean this: A bargain is a bargain. I have provided you with an estate; you must provide me with a wife."

"Really, Mr. Roy, you are almost unreasonable. I am not a matrimonial agency."

"Pardon me, but you are, for nature has made you the mother of your daughter."

"Well, I will go so far as to say that if you can win her consent I will not oppose you."

"Not oppose me? What excellent fooling is this!"

"You know, my dear sir, that Margaret can very well afford to hold her head high."

"Thanks to my constructive ability."

"Yes, yes, and I am not forgetful nor ungrateful, I am sure. I should consider myself a poorer Christian than I am if I were. But by-gones should be by-gones. You couldn't, you know, very well undo it now."

"You think not, eh?"

"Besides, as an honorable gentleman—"

"I, of course, could not distress an honorable lady. Yes, it is a question of honor, after all, is it not?"

"Most certainly. And I have every confidence in you, Mr. Roy, I assure you."

"Oh, thanks, thanks; you are very kind. But if you have so much confidence in me when you think I am unable to undo my work, it makes me blush to think what your blind and generous confidence in me will be when you come to realize how easily I can undo all that I have done."

"There, there, you know that I am very, very grateful to you,

and think all the world of you. I have even thought of making you one of my executors. I will think it all over, and talk with you some other time. There is no hurry, you know. I am so delighted that you are going to remain over my first party."

But Mr. Digby Roy was not to be diverted so easily. He was in no mood now to be trifled with. His beard hid the expression of his mouth, but his eyes were unveiled, and the light in them was dangerous. But our lady of fancy was in one of her light, irresponsible moods of exaltation when illusion ruled supreme, and the hard, cutting edge of reality gave place to outlines soft as dream and fluent as images in water. It would be easy to dub her insane, and thus end the matter; but to justify our conduct in so doing, it were necessary first to discover or invent a definition of insanity that would not place us and our friends in a somewhat awkward situation.

Said Mr. Digby Roy, in a tone low but clear as a bell on a frosty night, "You are mistaken. There is hurry—if you can call it hurry, after so much delay."

"I do not see why, unless"—she tittered—"unless you are jealous of Mr. Cowp."

"I am not afraid of anything in that quarter, I assure you," he answered, scornfully enough, but with no self-deception. He knew only too well that all his fear and danger lay in that quarter.

"Of course not; I was only joking. Though I understand that he is exceedingly wealthy. And, I must say, for an American, very much of a gentleman."

She had never put eyes on an American before; which circumstance only tended to strengthen her conviction that she knew quite accurately what kind of creature the American man was. This is the advantage of total ignorance of a subject. It absolves from doubt, and enables one to be cocksure of a thing.

Mr. Digby Roy smiled bitterly as he said, "Yes; and his white skin—he wears it like a native. One would hardly believe that his great-grandfather was a red Indian."

"Is it possible!" exclaimed Priscilla, nothing doubting.

"Beyond a doubt. And his great-grandchildren might very well be red Indians again. Atavism, Mrs. Oldcastle, is no respecter of persons, and is capable of doing some very extraordinary things. Only, for the world, don't you tell him a word of

this. I think, if I remember aright, that you forgot to tell your husband of the little circumstance that Conrad Twigg, *alias* Harold Crook, had left a son who is still alive, and who is, of course, the rightful owner of this very fine property?"

"Now, now, Mr. Roy, what a dreadful man you are! Why do you put it like that? It sounds so very—what shall I say?"

"You are sensitive, dear madam. I think I had really better, once for all, forget all about that—that trifling episode. Then I should never wound your sensibilities with awkward memories, eh?"

There was gall in his words, strong and bitter. Our lady of fancy, however, was determined only to find honey.

"Oh, you dear, good man," she exclaimed, with an angelic smile, "how I wish you would! It really is not worth remembering, you know. As concerns Silas, he knows nothing. I have followed your advice, and told him nothing. He is hardly a man of affairs, poor, dear fellow!"

"He does not realize, you think, that this world is nothing but a great struggle against conscience and prejudices?" he said, with perfect gravity. Priscilla looked at him dreamily, wondering to herself if he really meant what he said. Then she began to wonder if what he said was true. Then she said, quickly, as if she suddenly remembered that something was expected from her, "I tell him that he is impracticable. He would let go a substance to grasp after a shadow."

"A sad failing. I dare say, now, if I woke him up, and said, 'Mr. Oldcastle, Conrad Twigg was not Nathan Flint, but Harold Crook, whose son to-day is a poor, illiterate quarryman in Piupetau,' he would be foolish enough to think of going right off to Wyoming, to bring back the poor heir to his ancestral home, eh?"

"He would unquestionably do some ridiculous thing or other. But there, I am sure we have said enough on the subject for one night."

She made a movement of weariness and mental repugnance, and seemed about to rise.

"One moment, please," he said, and he said it in such a way that she sat perfectly still.

He continued, "But what if I said, 'Harold Crook's son is no illiterate, poor, and feeble quarryman out West, but an Eastern man, a gentleman, very wealthy, accomplished, a power in himself,

able to appreciate his ancestral estate and position, able to hold his own against any odds. To whom I have only to whisper a word, and—' ”

Priscilla laughed a bit hysterically.

“Suppose I added that he is a friend of mine. That his name is not Dick, but Cornelius.”

Priscilla's lips parted, and she sat bolt upright.

“That he is not in America, but in England. That at this moment he is talking—with—your—daughter!”

Priscilla sprang to her feet.

“What's that? O God, no!”

“Yes, madam, it is so—unless you find me a wife. Then he is a mere bird of passage.”

With a great cry Priscilla swayed, and would have fallen but for the promptitude of Mr. Digby Roy.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OF MARGARET'S VICTORY.

WHEN Margaret entered the room, followed by Cowp, she found her mother apparently lifeless in the arms of Mr. Digby Roy, while Silas stood by rubbing his hands in utter perplexity, and not quite sure whether he was really awake, or only indulging in a singularly vivid and unpleasant dream.

Margaret took in the whole scene at a glance, and with a piteous cry of “Oh, mother, mother!” she sprang to the assistance of Mr. Digby Roy.

“She has only fainted,” he said, in a sympathetic voice; “she will soon come to. Let us lay her on a couch.”

Silas now seemed to conclude that he was really awake, and began to render some assistance, while Margaret hurried to summon Rebecca, the wise woman of the house. Rebecca knew exactly what to do, and did it, with the result that Priscilla soon came round, and was able to go up-stairs. Before she went she was good enough to explain that she had evidently been overtaxing her strength, and that what with the heat and one thing and

another, she had suddenly felt sick and queer, and—the rest they knew. Mr. Digby Roy signified to her, more by gesture than speech, that the less said the better. He further managed to whisper to her, “Remember, there is no time to be lost.”

Priscilla passed a sleepless night, and in the morning when Margaret came to her, she looked quite ill.

“Let me send for the doctor, dear?” implored the girl.

“No, Margaret, no,” answered her mother, sadly, “it is of no use. He could do me no good, child. I must look elsewhere for my cure.”

Margaret, however, was young, and full of faith in the profession, never having been ill in her life. Therefore she said, “I am sure, dearest, Doctor Humfrey would do you good.”

Answered Priscilla, wearily, “You are mistaken, Margaret. He could do me no good at all. Doctor Humfrey meddles only with the body.”

“Well, mamma, and is it your mind that is affected?” replied the girl, smiling, as she bent down and kissed the pale, spiritual face.

“Yes, it is my mind. Oh, Margaret, Margaret, what in the world shall I do?”

It was like a cry of inward agony, and was followed by a flood of tears, which Margaret, filled with a strange alarm, helped to swell.

“Don’t, mother darling, don’t! What is it, dear one, what is it?” she murmured, pressing her face to her mother’s.

“I am in great, great trouble, and I do not know what to do,” moaned Priscilla.

“Does papa know?” inquired Margaret, who had wonderful faith in her father.

“No, and I cannot tell him; I dare not.”

At this Margaret looked exceedingly grave, and said, “That is strange, dear mamma, is it not?”

“Yes, I know. But you are not married, Margaret; you do not know everything.”

To which propositions the girl, after some reflection, was able to yield assent.

“There is Aunt Rebecca,” she said, tentatively.

“Ah, she is a good, kind creature, but— Child, I look to you, and you only, for help. You will not fail me, Margaret?”

To this appeal there was but one possible answer, and Margaret made it.

"Mother, I will not fail you," she said, quietly enough, but with a firmness of voice and a brave look of devotion on her face that sent a thrill of hope through Priscilla.

"Ah, you are a dear, noble, dutiful girl. Kiss me."

There was silence for a time, during which Priscilla lay with her eyes closed, thinking, wondering, fearing.

When she opened her eyes, she said, in sweet, evangelistic tones, "This world, my child, is nothing but a great struggle against conscience and prejudices."

She paused. Mr. Digby Roy had made the same enlightened observation, though Priscilla had quite forgotten the circumstance. She was no conscious plagiarist. The thought, the very form of expression remained with her because it happened to fit in to her present experience, as it had been coined for the occasion. The girl opened her eyes a little wider than usual. On the lips of Rebecca the words would have gathered an ironic flavor peculiar to her personality, would have seemed as characteristic and appropriate as a rich jest from the immortal and ever young Mr. Punch. Priscilla's tone was evangelic rather than philosophic or ironic or epigrammatic. There are people who, though they may not always be believed, yet always impress one as wishing to be believed. And it is always fairly open to one to take them at their face value, and believe in them. Priscilla was a member of this clan, which is not often guilty of daring speech.

"Yes, mamma," said Margaret, demurely enough, but with a dangerous gleam of humor in her eyes.

"There are times," continued Priscilla, "when the struggle grows too severe almost to be borne. It is so with me now, child. It will kill me soon, I think."

"Is it worth while, mamma, to struggle so with conscience and prejudice? Prejudice is, at least, a sort of old friend, and should be withstood gently, if at all. As to conscience, of course it is a troublesome guest to entertain, but still, dear, I do not very well see how we can quarrel with it, and turn it out-of-doors. Do you?"

Priscilla heaved a deep sigh.

"No," she said, "no, I do not. I only wish I did."

"What is it that is troubling you, dear?" asked Margaret, who

found it somewhat difficult to repress the imperious claims upon her gravity made by her sense of humor.

"Child, there is no use me beating about the bush. I might as well be plain first as last. You will have to have him, after all," said Priscilla, raising herself on one elbow, and speaking with a sudden access of energy that quite surprised Margaret.

"I don't understand you, mother. Whom am I to have? And why? And when? And where? And how?"

"Ah, it is no jesting matter, Margaret. With your beauty, with your position, with your future wealth—oh, I had looked high, I had had proud thoughts. An earl might have been glad of such a prize. And now it is all over. Oh, it is too bad, too bad!"

But the girl heeded not her mother's lamentations and tears. For the moment she was supremely, painfully, terribly egotistic. She thought only of herself. And a dreadful fear came over her.

"Tell me, please, what you mean. I do not follow you," she said, slowly.

"Do not follow me! After all I have said!" exclaimed Priscilla, with mingled surprise and reproach in her tones.

Margaret looked at her mother intently for a while, and then with beautiful instinct she said, "You have said very little, dear, and most of that is dark to me. But your thoughts have been many and swift, like troops of horsemen from the desert. But I cannot follow them, mother mine. I can only tread in the tracks of your words. Speak, and open wide your heart, mother, that I may know what to hope and what to dread."

The color was dying out of her face, even as the music was passing from her voice.

"Child, child, you have got to marry Digby Roy!"

"Ah, is that it?"

"Remember, it is none of my seeking. I do not wish it. Oh, it will kill me—but it must be, it must be!"

"No, mother, there is no 'must' about it. He is no slave-owner, and I am no slave."

"Do you think if such brave words were of any avail, it would ever have come to this, child? Fine words, brave words—bubbles, pretty wretched bubbles that burst and vanish when touched with the merest toy-spear of Fact. We have to face Fact now, Margaret, the wicked, poisoned spear of Fact!"

"Was this the cause of your illness last night?"

"Yes. He told me he could wait no longer. He has done us great, very great services, there is no denying. And he loves you. I believe he honestly and truly loves you, and would make you a—"

"Mother—hush!"

Priscilla gave a quick, startled look at Margaret, and sank back on her pillow with a heavy sigh. Margaret was the first to break the silence.

"Why must I marry him?" she asked, in a low voice.

"He would become our enemy, if you didn't."

"That is no reason," said Margaret, with a flash of spirit that looked like temper.

"Ah, you don't understand. You do not know him."

"I would as soon have him for an enemy as a friend. Who is Mr. Digby Roy, mother, that you should value his friendship more than your daughter's happiness? I am not afraid of him. Let him ask me. I will give him his answer."

"No, no, he will take no denial. He has power to injure us, child."

"I do not understand you, mother. I cannot see how it is possible for him to injure us."

"Oh, I cannot, I dare not explain. You must take my word for it. He could ruin us, do you hear, ruin us!" cried Priscilla, in a tragic tone.

"Will you tell me, mother, how?" repeated Margaret.

"Don't ask me. I dare not tell you. You know he helped me to get the estate. Ah yes, he helped me more than I can tell you. He did a great deal for us, Margaret. And what he did he can undo."

"Ah, I see! Is not the property, then, rightfully ours?"

"Rightfully ours? Of course it is rightfully ours, and always was, and always will be. That is not the question, Margaret. It is a question not of right, but of evidence, of proof. Certain proofs are needed, you see, to perpetuate our right. He has them in his possession. He will give them up on one condition only. Otherwise, he will destroy them. Now do you understand?"

"He will give them up, if—if I marry him?"

"Yes, yes. If he destroys them we are beggared. Promise me you will have him, there's a good girl."

"No, mother, never! Not if I have to work my fingers to the bone. I hate him!"

Her head was up, and her eyes flashed, and she tapped the floor lightly, proudly, defiantly, with her right foot. Her voice was level, and calm, but cold—cold as steel. Priscilla looked at her, hid her face in her pillow, and moaned piteously.

"Mother mine, you think me selfish in this, cruelly selfish. Well, I am. But not more than you. For money, for position, you would sell me like an animal to a man I hate. You dread poverty more than crime. Well, I, too, dread poverty, mother. When we were poor, we were nobodies. I was nobody. Ladies glanced at me from their carriages insolently, made remarks to each other, smiled, and turned their heads disdainfully. Gentlemen looked me boldly in the face, but none raised their hats or made way for me. Mother, I was then what I am now—one of them in body and in soul. Yet they knew me not—would not know me. I must go lonely, or group with those who were alien to me in thought, in sympathy, in habit, in prejudice. Well, I preferred to go lonely. But I suffered all the same. Did I ever complain, mother? Did I not try my best to be sunshine in those cloudy days to you and father? Since then I have become an heiress, and simultaneously ladies and gentlemen have grown such sweet and chivalrous manners. The world is full of exquisite politeness and devotion of a sudden. I find it good to live. Dread poverty! And yet not poverty, but poverty's curse: isolation from refinement, and the insolence of the rich. These things, which are as sharp knives in the spirit, these things I will gladly bear without murmurings and repinings, if need be. But to escape them I will not marry a man I hate."

She turned away and stood for some moments as if undecided what to do. Then she left the room.

Priscilla sobbed and moaned until she heard Margaret go downstairs, when she hushed her moans and dried her tears, and began to think. Silas came, and looking down on her dainty frills and sweetly *spirituelle* face, remembered her as his lovely girl-bride, and wondered how it was that Time, which had cut and hacked him like a clumsy sculptor a block of marble, had touched her only with the subtle touch of art that brings forth loveliness and mellowness, and the strange hints of a world where angels are at home, and good women, and—and—perhaps—for funny

things do happen even in this world—good men. He kissed her almost devoutly, and would have stayed with her; but she sent him off with a heavenly smile, and a gentle request not to trouble about her; she was much better, but needed perfect rest. She would send for him when she wanted him.

And Rebecca came also.

“You were talking with Mr. Digby Roy when this occurred, I understand,” were her first words.

At which Priscilla opened her eyes with mild wonder, and murmured, “Was I? I almost forget.”

The art was perfect, and perfect art will deceive Nature herself.

Rebecca had been putting two and two together, and had come prepared to show Priscilla that she had some small skill in addition. But Priscilla’s answer—which was not one of words merely, but also of intonation and facial expression—introduced into her mind a sudden and swift element of doubt. Two and two remained surely four, but were the factors she had been dealing with of a certainty two and two? Three and five suddenly sprang in front of her, like gigantic ruffians from under the hedge; they menaced, they gesticulated, they bewildered if they did not intimidate. She dodged them, indeed, and escaped, but meanwhile the identity of certain factors remained an open question. She was dismissed like Silas, only she carried with her a painful uncertainty as to whether she was treading the firm earth or a treacherous bog.

Priscilla was alone for a while; then a maid brought in some breakfast. There is a time to be frank and there is a time to practise: Priscilla frankly ate an honest breakfast. After which she read, according to custom, a few select passages from a daintily bound volume of *Morning Portions*. This did her a world of good. It seemed to restore certain disarranged if not broken connections, and placed her sentimentally *en rapport* with a powerful system of things, which it is never less than a misfortune to antagonize, and whose favor and support enable one to carry on bravely the “great struggle against conscience and prejudices.”

She lay for hours motionless, with her eyes like her mind wide open, save at intervals when Silas or Margaret or Rebecca stole silently in on tiptoe, and as silently retreated. Then her eyelids

fell, and she seemed to be sleeping peacefully. She was thinking harder than she had ever thought before: her sense of conduct, you see, was fine. Hard thinking should always be done either in prison or in bed. Our lady of fancy was undergoing a singular experience. For once in a way she was face to face with Reality. Its aspect was exceeding grim, its eye was like fire, its breath like frost, its touch one of rough iron. The fluid world at last had crystallized. The magic of her fancy was dead. What to do, what to do to prevent her dear estate from running through her fingers like water? To avoid exposure and ruin? To appease the implacable man who held her destiny in his hand?

The day was far spent when she summoned her maid.

"Where is Miss Margaret?"

"Please, ma'am, I think she is down-stairs with the gentlemen."

"Tell her I wish to see her at once, alone."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

OF MARGARET'S DEFEAT.

MAID Marion was mistaken. Margaret was not down-stairs with the gentlemen. She had given the gentlemen a wide berth all day. Mr. Digby Roy, impelled against his better judgment by curiosity and no little anxiety, had sought her company early in the day. But a very few words had suggested to him the propriety of not thrusting himself forward at the present moment, and with a pang of jealousy he withdrew, leaving her with Cowp. The latter, having a good conscience, an honest purpose, and a right-down passionate love in his heart, was not easily repulsed. Talk he would, and she perforce must listen, seeing that he held her firmly by the hand. At length, however, and perhaps as soon as she wished, she broke from him, and sought shelter in the privacy of her own chamber.

Then the two stranded males were thrown on their own resources, and perhaps for the first time in their lives they realized how inadequate those resources were. Silas was abroad somewhere, and so, in order to escape from themselves, they fell back

on the primitive and childlike device of seeking each other's company. Most of the conduct of life is but a repetition with variations of the same device, and for the same purpose. Its popularity should argue success, whereas it mostly argues stupidity. In the present instance it was a total failure. The double charm of confidence and self-confidence was broken; and after a superficial and aimless talk of ten minutes, which might have stood as a nineteenth-century model of the utter inutility of civilized speech as an instrument of wit, truth, and comfort, they parted without ceremony. Each had the admirable sense to tell himself that he was a mixture in equal parts of fool and brute. For without quite knowing why, each was on the verge of quarrelling with the other. In their present moods the chances are that five minutes later these well-bred men would have been seeking peace of mind by attacking each other, hammer and tongs style, with their fists. And all things considered, it might have done them good if they had. We will not follow them all through that dreadful day, which luncheon did not relieve and even dinner did not atone for.

Margaret kept her room, and, like her mother, was thinking her own thoughts and fighting her own fight. For hours she had been screwing up her courage to an interview with Mr. Digby Roy. It was going to be a royal interview; one that he would never forget, and probably never forgive. She had constructed the argument; she had completed a most elaborate and effective toilet. Her hand was on the bell-handle to summon her maid to request a private interview with Mr. Digby Roy in the library, when a gentle tap came at the door, and Maid Marion entered and delivered her message. A few minutes later Margaret was in her mother's room.

"Lock the door, my child; I do not wish any one to come in," said Priscilla, in a voice so gentle, so sad, that the girl's loving pity stormed her heart in a moment.

For the last five minutes Priscilla had been weeping as bitterly, as copiously, as violently, as if she had been the victim of hysteria, instead of the player of a piece of comedy, slender, indeed, but neat and skilful. The storm had subsided, but a great swell was still on, and the seas ran high. Her breath came short and quick; her bosom rose and fell in a way that Silas would certainly have admired; her eyes were still wet with tears, and that calm, spiritualized face was agitated with emotion, while a crimson spot lay

on each cheek. These beauty spots—for such they were—did very much to kill the impression of virtue in distress. They looked too much like paint, like touches of worldliness grown wanton. So that our lady of fancy bore no slight similitude unto a fair saint recovering penitentially from a dangerous and unaccountable attack of sin. We see only what we have the eyes to see: Margaret had no eyes for this image of her mother. She saw only her suffering and sorrow; and her heart smote her for her selfishness.

“Mother, mother, dearest,” she cried, pillowing her face against Priscilla’s head, “it will kill me to see you suffering like this. I was just going to see Mr. Roy in the library when you sent for me.”

“Ah! what for?” asked Priscilla, with immediate interest.

“To have it out with him, mother, of course. The man must be a—”

“Shh! You may be sorry some day if you give your tongue too much freedom now. It would have done no good, if you had seen him. Men like Mr. Roy never take a step forward until they are obliged to, and they never take a step backward until they are driven.”

“Then I will drive him,” answered Margaret, vehemently, feeling, and indeed looking, full of driving power.

“Ah, child, if you only knew—”

She sighed. The sigh was followed by a sob. The sob was succeeded by a fit of trembling and shivering, until Margaret was half distracted, thinking that her mother was surely going to die.

At this stage Priscilla recovered some of her self-control; she smiled faintly, and murmured, “It is of no use. I had hoped to keep it a secret till my death—to have spared you—to have spared myself. But it is not to be. Oh, Margaret, Margaret, it is a true saying, *Be sure your sin will find you out.*”

Said Margaret, with a strange, cold fear creeping over her, “I have not sinned—not yet. Have you, mother?”

“Sinned? Ask rather, have I suffered for my sin. Yes, I have suffered for long years. Am I not suffering now? And the future, what will it, what can it be but one long, dreadful piece of bitter, bitter suffering? Bend down to me, child. I cannot, I dare not speak it aloud.”

"No, dear, no, not to-night. You are not well enough. You will make yourself ill."

"What matters it if it kills me? What mother would care to live, after she has been compelled to bare her hidden shame to her child's gaze?"

"Does father know it?" gasped Margaret, panting, with face aflame.

"Your father know it!—your father know it!" She laughed hysterically. "The day your father knows it finds me a dead woman, Margaret Oldcastle!"

"Ha! then you have sinned indeed. Poor mother, poor, dear mother!"

And the girl lowered her proud head, and covered her face with her hands, and wept bitterly.

Said Priscilla, presently, speaking in a half-voice, "This morning I said it was the property that was in danger. It is something more than the property, my child. Listen! *It is your mother's good name.*"

A violent shock seemed to convulse the girl's frame; she would have started up, but Priscilla's arms were about her and held her firmly. She moaned and trembled like a creature sorely wounded.

Continued Priscilla, "You thought I would have sacrificed you to save the property. Yes, and I was willing you should think so. What mattered it to me, child, so long as you did not guess the truth? The clumsy lie was no good, though; I might have known it. How he came to learn the secret, my one secret, Margaret, my one shame, I do not know. But he knows it. And now you must know it—yes, yes, oh, merciful Heaven! yes, pity me, pity me, but you must know it as he knows it, then you can save me or—"

And there in the room that would have been quite dark but for the patch of moonlight that lay on the foot of the bed, Priscilla told a sad, a wofully sad and pathetic story that might have very well been true, only it was not. But to Margaret it was true, and true not of some unknown lady, frail, tempted, and betrayed, but true OF HER OWN MOTHER. The sorrow and shame of it burned themselves into her soul.

"Does he know this awful thing? Oh, it is dreadful, mother; poor, dear mother, poor, dear mother!" she repeated as if to herself, over and over again.

"You see now, child, that he has me at his mercy. I dare not defy him. I can but die," said Priscilla, and her tone of cold despair sent a shiver through the girl.

She started to her feet, pale as death, but with an ominous light in her eyes. She stood for some time silent, gazing at the beautiful moonlit landscape outside. She turned her glance to her mother, and smiled upon her full of pitying, self-sacrificing love.

"No, darling," she said, slowly and sweetly, "you shall not die. It is not for me to reproach you, mother mine. My turn has not yet come. I have never been tempted. I can understand, though, that when the right temptation overtakes one, the measure of one's strength is not their strength, but their weakness. Oh, mother, mother; may God help me!"

She fought her emotion bravely down. She bent and kissed her mother.

Then she said, simply, but it was sufficient, "Darling, I will marry Mr. Digby Roy!"

CHAPTER XXXIX.

OF FINDING THE HIDING-PLACE.

NOTHING shows what a distended, flabby, and diffuse thing is life better than a good rattling dream, which condenses a dozen years of experience into the last sixty seconds of an afternoon nap. Life thus condensed is tolerably interesting, and as a waking experiment would certainly lend itself more favorably to the treatment of those philosophers and historians in disguise, who are styled Novelists and Romancers, perhaps because they are the only writers who, as a class, eschew novelties, steer clear of romance, and cultivate the stern facts of life. Time, however, which being interpreted is but a local name for eternity, is on the side of the novelist. It traverses with equal pace the wide sterile regions of commonplace, the bright uplands of heroism, and the sheltered valleys and hidden dells where lurk, unguessed, strange and moving forms of beauty and ugliness, of vice and virtue, of peace and

strife, of comedy and tragedy. With equal pace it marches to the birth of a Buddha and a Barrabas, to the morning of Waterloo and the morning of Micheltown. Through its sieve the rubbish of life is ever running, and the pearls. But these latter we may gather and string.

And so it came to pass that time marched on, with the sublime indifference of Fate to human circumstances, until the date fixed for the great garden-party at Abbot's Hey lay only one day ahead. There was some little bustle and a great degree of subdued excitement at the Hall. The one unruffled soul was that of Gaffer Bucket. He shared the indifference of Time itself. His great concernment was to kill time; to arrive at the end of each day's journey sound in wind and limb, eat a good supper, smoke a comfortable pipe, and sleep a dreamless sleep. The rest was all but leather and prunello. Had it been possible, they would have hurried him and flurried him; but it was not possible. Like Time, his pace was equal; and between the lifting up and the putting down of his foot there was time, not to photograph him, but to paint him in the unquestionably clever accomplishment of keeping his balance on one leg.

Silas was fidgety, humorous, and short-tempered. The thought of receiving the company was like a dull leaden roof to his mind. It cut off all the blue and all the yellow and all the green of life. It would have put him into a coffin and a grave, but for one little circumstance, to wit, that he would see the Countess! That thought held solid pleasure, and atoned for much. It was as a wild, sweet rush of song from some minstrel of the air to one in a wide and drear forest. And by the same token, the old magic of the divine Francisca still worked among men; the old charm still held.

Priscilla? She never looked better in her life. The world of fancy had again lowered itself round about her. That brief intrusion of—Reality into her consciousness remained not as a memory of a piece of actual, painful experience, but as of a vivid and disagreeable dream that bore no practical relation to her waking life. Occasionally, when one's digestive apparatus is out of order, in sleep one may drive, so to speak, a coach and four through the Decalogue without incurring any moral responsibility, and without suffering any pangs of conscience on awaking. Philosophers have held that this life is but a sleep and a troubled

dream, and after death we wake and are refreshed. Certain it is that Priscilla felt no qualms of conscience, having no adequate sense of reality. How far she was morally responsible, in the sense in which ordinary folk feel and acknowledge their responsibility, I am not anxious to decide. It would be no difficult thing to win a verdict of guilty against our lady of fancy; but we are not in search of a verdict that would not increase our stock of truth. There are many Priscilla Oldcastles in the world, and as psychological curiosities they possess a root of interest for students of human nature that is altogether wanting in the insane, the vicious, and the criminal.

As for Margaret, she had set herself to save her mother from scandal and shame, and she undertook the task with the spirit and bearing of a noble heart and a proud soul. Tear-reddened eyes, woe-drawn mouth, sad looks and weary sighs—these hints of unselfishness and invitations of compassion, which might have been pardonable in, and certainly would have been resorted to by, most young ladies in her situation, our Margaret utterly disdained. What she went through in private, with no eye to see, no ear to hear, is another matter. In public she showed that the mould of splendid antique womanhood was not broken when she was born. The circumstance of her engagement to Mr. Digby Roy was, as yet, known only to that gentleman, herself, and her mother; it was to be kept secret till after the party. She had had an interview with Mr. Digby Roy, but it was a very different one from that for which she had made her elaborate toilet.

“Mamma has told me everything,” she said to him. Then she paused and looked him full in the face.

“Indeed,” he answered, and lifted his brows in something like scornful amazement. His wits were nimble, and soon suggested that she might think so, but she was surely mistaken: Priscilla was not such a fool. He did not like the cold, proud, steady look she fixed upon him.

“Well,” he said, at length, “then it is settled, I hope?”

“Yes; it is settled.”

“I will make you a good husband.”

“I cannot say that I shall make you a good wife. You do not deserve one.”

The color began to creep into her face, but a great wave of indignant self-scorn drove it back, and left her like white marble.

"I rest my faith and hope not on my deserts but on your virtues. You can never be other than a good wife, Margaret."

A short, bitter laugh of mockery broke from her.

"Can I ever care for you? Can I ever respect you? Do I not hate you—scoundrel!"

Mr. Digby Roy fell back a pace. For a moment he really thought she had cut him across the face with knife or whip. Which, in itself, was not a bad sign, seeing that words still had power to wound him. Then she left him, and he mused a while.

"Always so . . . nothing cuts like Truth . . . she didn't tell her the truth, that is dead sure . . . what did she tell her? . . . worse, perhaps . . . looked like a young goddess in petticoats . . . what a creature to love . . . to hate . . . d—— it . . . I would rather have had a bullet through me."

He sighed. Then he laughed. Then he lit a small cigar, and went up-stairs to dress for dinner. "Rather have had a bullet through me," he murmured, as he shot the bolt of his door.

Since then, however, he had eaten a number of good dinners; had had time to survey the situation in, as it seemed to him, all its bearings; had come to the conclusion that, all things considered, he had won easier than he expected, and that he was a deucedly lucky fellow. It is always something of a pleasure to come across a man, be he saint or sinner, who honestly believes in his luck. It is like full-blooded optimism, with the fat paunch and the full purse. It is like a bit of real summer in Old England. It is like discovering a fine voice in a music hall. It is like—being young again. Mr. Digby Roy believed in his luck. I do not know why; I do not think he knew why himself. It certainly was not because fortune had always or often favored him. Perhaps experience had little to do with it, and temperament much.

Be that as it may, to-day as he sunned himself luxuriously on the terrace he sipped that most subtle of all mental stimulants—the knowledge that one's peculiar belief has at length been justified. His would have been bliss unalloyed, but for—the alloy. Cowp's previous visit to Abbot's Hey, about which his reticence had been as profound as it was unusual, was still a painful mystery to Mr. Digby Roy. It seemed so full of ugly possibilities. It tormented him day and night. All he could do, however, was

to wait and watch, especially the latter. Cat never watched mouse more closely, more skilfully.

Even now, as he sits sunning himself with the graceful voluptuousness of a tiger, smoking his handsome briar-root, and toying gayly with his pleasant thoughts, his glance rests continually upon Cowp down yonder on one of the terraces overlooking the shrubbery. He sees him stroll away and enter the park and strike a foot-path that will bring him out on the road just above the "Blacksmith's Arms," at the foot of the hill leading to the church. Close by is a bit of narrow woodland that winds and stretches almost up to the shrubbery, from which it is separated only by a dividing wedge of meadow-land. In five minutes Mr. Digby Roy has covered the distance, and is ensconced between two thick holly-bushes, within a stone's throw of the road, and within gunshot of the "Blacksmith's Arms."

Presently Cowp reaches the road, stands for a moment or two looking at the inn, and then ascends the hill and enters the churchyard. He is standing yonder, by the grassy bank topped with a well-trimmed hedge, in front of the three great Twigg tombs of marble, when Mr. Digby Roy looks over the gate into the churchyard. Mr. Digby Roy's taste does not run towards meditations among the tombs; when he enters the church-yard, which is seldom, he looks at the tops of the trees, at the clouds, at anything rather than the graves or the gravestones. Now he draws back, goes to the sexton's cottage higher up the road, where, being known as one of the gentlemen staying at the Hall, he secures the key of the vestry door, in order to examine some mural inscriptions in the church as he explains. He locks himself in, and, going to a window overlooking the church-yard, stands on a pew-seat, gives a low laugh, and murmurs, "Capital, capital."

Those great coffers of marble seem to possess a singular interest for Cowp. He goes round each of them in a slow, deliberate fashion, halting on each of the four sides, and scanning the inscriptions closely. Mr. Digby Roy begins to wonder what in the name of fortune he can find to interest him in those hideous monuments—as a matter of fact the monuments are rather handsome. He wishes he knew whose they are; when Cowp goes away he will go and find out. But Cowp evidently is not going just yet, for he sits down on the warm, dry grass with his back

to the bank, stretches his legs, and really looks as if he was going to have a nap in the glorious sunshine.

Mr. Digby Roy has not reckoned on anything so absurd happening. His position is not one he would have chosen for comfort. He is standing with one foot on the top of a pew, and the toe of his other foot just resting on the window-sill. He steadies himself by putting a hand on the wall. His hand by chance rested on a marble tablet.

"Beastly nuisance . . . perfect fool . . . keep a fellow here all day."

Of a sudden he is conscious of the coldness of the marble tablet. He withdraws his hand, and his eye happens to catch the lettering: *Sacred to the Memory of Jonathan Twigg, J.P., D.L., M.A., Esquire of Abbot's Hey.* He forgets himself, his eyes open wide with surprise, he starts, and down he comes in a heap on the floor. Why, the church is full of Twigg tablets, and Twigg ghosts; and we will leave him there among them, wishing only that it were now the very witching time of night, when graveyards yawn: a touch of horror might do him good.

Cowp was not going to sleep—not quite. His heart beat strong and steady; his pulse was full. There was no trace of excitement about him; only he thought that he had never truly lived until to-day. To-day the current of life was strong in him. It flowed like a great river, proud, irresistible, its natural motion set to a deep, vibrant music all its own. Every faculty of his nature seemed enlarged and strengthened, so that his former familiar self seemed something of a shrivelled copy, a flaccid caricature. Wine was not in him, nor opium, nor any other subtle creature to whom is given the mysterious power of hinting to man of the buried treasure that lies hid within him.

His love for Margaret had struck glorious harmony through his nature, but it was not that which had lifted him up into the splendor of self-sufficiency. Which is a pity, perhaps, because that circumstance would have set him forth as a right royal lover in the eyes of the ladies, without whose commendation a man is lighter than the dust of the balance, and is Naught, Naught. Therefore the temptation to lie is very great, seeing that if we stick close to truth it may even kick us like a vicious mule. Yet even so, with our life in our mule's heels, we follow her ladyship and declare that the sole reason of Cowp's exaltation of spirit was

this—yesterday was his twenty-eighth birthday! At last he was free to learn the secret of his parentage, the secret that had colored his imagination, that had enveloped his whole life in fascinating and dreadful mystery.

Half an hour went by before he pulled from his pocket the jealously-guarded letter, sealed in three places, that bore the inscription, "*For Cornelius Crook Cowp. Not to be opened till he has passed his twenty-eighth year.*" His hands trembled as he broke the seals. Inside was another envelope, on which was written, "*For Cornelius Crook Cowp. Not to be opened by any one else. If he is dead, burn it unopened.*" He broke the single seal, and drew forth the contents, a half-sheet of note-paper, on which was written the following:

"Directions for finding the box buried in Abbot's Hey churchyard.—Find the three big coffer tombs of the Twiggs standing north and south. To the south, between the second and third tomb, is a space about a yard wide. Right opposite, to the east, is a big yew-tree standing by the side of the bank. From this tree to the edge of the second tomb is about twelve feet. The length of the tomb is also just twelve feet. Measure off six feet in the space between the second and third tomb, and there, right in the middle of the space, at a depth of two feet, you will find a big flat stone. There is another underneath it, and between the two you will find the box—unless your luck, like mine, is bad, which God forbid.

"HAROLD CROOK. [C. T.]"

"How strange, how strange!" ejaculated Cowp, springing to his feet.

He was standing immediately opposite the second Twigg tomb, and so near to the yew-tree that he put out his hand and touched it.

"He touched it, too . . . father, father . . . this is the spot I chose from the first. . . . Was it instinct? . . . or something else?"

He cast his eyes on the letter again. Suddenly he looked up, with a gesture of surprise.

"C. T., C. T.," he repeated. "What can it mean? Can it mean Twigg? Could his name have been Twigg? Was that why he chose this place to hide it in? Am I a Twigg? Am I of the same stock as Margaret? Oh, if it were only night!"

He measured the distance from the yew-tree to the tomb and found it right. Then he measured off the space between the tombs, and fixed upon the spot where he would dig, marking it with a handful of gravel.

Then he strolled away, murmuring, "I hope it will be cloudy. I wish it would rain."

CHAPTER XL.

OF FINDING WHAT WAS HIDDEN.

MR. DIGBY ROY picked himself up, with a bruised knee and a sprained wrist and a temper out of joint. He looked at the Jonathan Twigg leading captive behind him half the letters of the alphabet, and cursed him and his whole tribe. They seemed all there, too, to hear him. He counted eleven Twigg tablets.

"Regular camping-ground for the tribe . . . Twiggs enough for a forest . . . Jonathan Twigg, Ebenezer ditto, item Elijah, item Cornelius . . . Biblical to the backbone. . . . Ah, what have we here? Henry Godolphin . . . a worldling as I live. A black swan . . . Amelia, wife of—the worldling. Poor Amelia! . . . Hannah, also a wife . . . Judeth, with an e, too, also a—no a daughter. A blind girl without an i . . . Phineas ditto . . . just like listening to one of my dear, dear mother-in-law's genealogical outbursts. Well, at last their tree is down for good, and all the Twiggs thereof have doubtless gone to the proper place for Twiggs—to the fire . . . sturdy old race though . . . long-lived too. . . . Aged seventy-two . . . eighty-seven . . . eighty-four . . . sixty-nine . . . thirty-one—ah, the blind girl; doesn't count; given over to death at the font . . . ninety-one . . . by Jove! he was a tenant for life with a vengeance . . . as an intervening life, his successor must have considered him a great failure . . . thank Heaven, the Twigg strain is not strong in my dear, dear mother-in-law's composition . . . all gone except— . . . if he only knew! . . . what irony! the last of his race and name, surrounded by the memorials of his ancestors, and he knows nothing at all about it . . . doesn't even know his real name

. . . a foreigner . . . Gad, I think I should sniff my descent in the very soil. . . . Oh, ye stupid Twigg ghosts, where are ye? What doing, thinking, feeling? Why do ye not thrill it into him that he is a Twigg, a Twigg, a Twigg? Donkeys you . . . donkey he . . . mayhap donkey I . . . can he have an inkling of the truth? He must guess something, else why— . . . bah, I am wool-gathering surely . . . perhaps he has gone.”

Once again he mounted onto the top of the pew, balanced himself firmly, and looked out. Cowp was in the act of pulling from his pocket the sealed envelope. For the next twenty minutes Mr. Digby Roy had no consciousness of time. He watched every movement of Cowp's with a fearful interest. He seemed fascinated, horrified, spellbound. His instinct outran his reason, and interpreted in a flash the meaning of movements that might very well have mystified a less acute observer. At last he sprang lightly down, and ran on tiptoe to another window, from whence he watched Cowp leave the church-yard and descend the hill. Then he stood in the aisle, with his hands in his pockets, and whistled.

He stopped, and broke out with, “Here's a pretty kettle of fish and no mistake . . . he's got wind of something . . . d—— him for a cunning Yankee rogue . . . wonder what he's looking for? . . . I brought him down . . . asked him to come . . . play him off indeed . . . looks as if he'll play me off if I . . . with all the trumps in my hand . . . never . . . never . . . not if I have to. . . .”

He went out, locking the door behind him, and, glancing carelessly round, began to stroll about the graveyard, reading the inscriptions apparently with some interest, though he saw not one of them, and edging carefully towards the three great tombs. He stood in front of them. He read the inscriptions.

“Twiggs all, by Heaven! He has struck the trail, as I live!” he almost gasped.

He went deadly pale, and leaned as if for support against one of the coffers.

Presently he exclaimed, “Fool, I am forgetting, It was here he was measuring.”

He entered the narrow space between the second and the third tomb, and examined the ground very carefully.

“Ah!” he exclaimed, as his glance fell on the handful of gravel, “that marks the spot he was looking for . . . something under

there . . . entrance to tomb perhaps . . . which? . . . what then? . . . bah! I must be growing romantical . . . what did those d——d measurements mean? . . . this gravel? . . . he will come again, sure . . . dig . . . night . . . I must . . . nasty business, but . . . if he wins, I lose . . . and all the trumps in my hand! Never . . . never!”

He left the church-yard, went up the hill, and returned the key with such a pleasant manner and handsome gratuity that from that day on he could count upon the sexton as his man.

Coming down the hill he met an old man going to his mid-day dinner; he lived in a cottage beyond the sexton's. He was doing parish work, clearing out the ditch on one side of the road, removing the grass, and banking up the hedge. The old man's face was open and cheery-looking. Oculists affirm that we had once three eyes, one at the back of the head: in those days people looked backward. The mental habit has survived the physical faculty on which it was founded. The habit is a bad one, engendering self-accusation, regret, and the pale spectral wisdom that makes one out of conceit with himself. It gives the dead no chance of burying the dead. The old road-mender had no eye in the back of his head or his mind; he saw only what was in front of him, under his feet, and within reach of his mouth. He was content. His two eyes showed it; open soft gray eyes, placid as pools. He was at one with himself and nature as serenely as a well-fed ox, as profoundly as a well-rooted oak. It was in this light that he hit the fancy of Mr. Digby Roy.

“Drink to the secret of happiness, oneness with nature, my friend. Drink destruction to the eye at the back of the head,” he said, as he dropped a small handful of coppers into the hands of the parish sage.

Lower down the road, under the hedge, lay the old man's spade. Mr. Digby Roy caught sight of it as he passed; at the distance of a score yards he suddenly halted, swung round, and came back. He picked up the spade, and marched quickly down the road. In another minute his coat was off, his back was bent, and, hidden from observation, he was digging with scientific precision and coolness in the space between the tombs. The sun was hot, the work was new to him, his muscles were strained, and drops of perspiration fell thick and fast. Still he dug and dug, and all to

no purpose. He had dug a hole two feet deep, and long enough for a child's grave. He halted, breathless.

"D—— it, it looks like hoax after all."

He began to shovel in the earth again. Again he halted.

"No, unless he is a born idiot, which he isn't, he thinks there is something worth looking for here. He may be fooled himself, though. I'll go a foot lower anyway."

He resumed his labor with renewed energy. Presently as he drove his spade down it struck against something hard, with a force that jarred his arm to the shoulder.

"Rock. This ends it, I suppose."

He sunk his spade in another spot, pressed upon it with his foot. Down, down, down it went till the handle was in the soil. "Ah!" he exclaimed, joyfully, and fell to work, clearing the soil from the obstruction. In a little while it lay open before him—nothing but a flat stone. He leaned on his spade and surveyed it attentively.

"Not strong in geology . . . take an oath it didn't grow there . . . Nature throws her chips anywhere . . . dumps her rubbish everywhere, and hides it up with pretty grasses, weeds as pretty, and wild flowers . . . hides her rents, rags, and dirt under silk and satin, plush and velvet, like a gaudy slattern . . . was it put there by Nature ages ago, or by man not long ago? . . . under it lies . . . something? . . . nothing? By Jove! I'm almost inclined to cover it up again . . . I think I'm half afraid to settle the point . . . beastly system of things . . . no idea of middle course in Nature . . . idea never struck her . . . It is or it is not . . . between the two a bottomless gulf, clean cut . . . no bridge, no projecting ledges whereby one may leap from side to side . . . I think I will raise it."

He inserted his spade under one end of the stone.

"And decide my fate . . . so."

He put forth his strength. The stone turned over and fell on one side, and there, resting on another piece of rock, lay a small iron box fastened with a padlock. The spade fell from the hands of Mr. Digby Roy, and those members instantly betook themselves to his pockets, their natural hiding-place in seasons of astonishment.

"By jingo! . . . didn't expect it . . . own up now, didn't expect it . . . some good in the beastly system of things after all . . . It

is . . . It is not . . . may go hang . . . little treasure, how I love thee! thou art dear to me . . . a stranger I am, but a friend . . . see, the sun shines. Art thou not glad to see it again . . . rejoice with me, as I with thee . . . thy black captivity is ended . . . to keep thee safe in case of a surprise—so.”

He seized the box in his hands, cast a hurried glance around, and, darting up the bank, hid the box in the hedge. Twenty minutes later the stone was replaced, the soil was thrown back and well stamped in, the carefully cut sods were replaced with a neatness and skill that would have done credit to an expert gardener, the handful of gravel rested quietly in its place, and nothing less than a close examination would have revealed the circumstance that had occurred. This by daylight; one working in the night would discover nothing.

Mr. Digby Roy had been working against time, and had won; when he returned the spade to the spot where he found it, the road-mender had not returned, and not a soul was in sight. He never felt happier in his life than when, having recovered his treasure, he found himself safe from observation in the thickest part of the home woods.

His boots troubled him; they were coated and plastered all over with clay. He made his way cautiously into the shrubberies, into the deepest and dankest part of the ravine, where there was a busy foam-flecked stream, wild and melodious. He sat on a piece of rock, took off his boots, and went to work. The clay clung like pitch, and seemed to turn into tallow; lurked between the soles and the uppers, in the lace-holes, in every crease and hollow. He used his knife, and at odd times his fingers. He washed and scraped and rubbed, and rubbed and scraped and washed, until at length they were wholly clean. Their appearance was not altogether satisfactory, though, for with the clay had gone all trace of blacking. The life seemed to have gone out of them, and their complexion was of that peculiar and disreputable rusty-gray, shading off into green, that one observes in those dead and derelict individuals lying by the way-side. They did not, however, look so impudent as the latter, which seem to grin, and pull faces, and inquire, with horrible irony, of the passer-by, what has become of their owner. Mr. Digby Roy sought a marshy spot in the ravine, and walked through it, and came out satisfied: Bagley Wood, a couple of miles off, was very marshy on the north side.

Another difficulty now presented itself—what was to be done with his treasure-trove? It was too large for any jacket-pocket, and to carry it under his arm was out of the question. He could think of nothing better than to feign a botanical expedition, fill his handkerchief with mosses, and conceal the box among them.

“Won’t do . . . sure to meet somebody . . . Margaret . . . funny not to show them to her . . . should if they were real . . . Cowp . . . infernal curiosity . . . ‘Let me see them; I like mosses; mighty scarce in our woods.’ . . . Rebecca, sweet dragoness . . . cares no more for mosses than for white mice . . . looks at me with her dragon’s eye . . . sees Heaven knows what . . . ‘Mosses, ah? In the vegetable kingdom, I would choose to be a moss above all else; it is nice to be so admired by intelligent people, you know. Oh, do please show me them, every one. I dote on mosses.’ . . . Angelic crocodile . . . no, it won’t do.”

He was sorely tempted to seek some open solitude, some moorland hollow, and spend the afternoon in examining the contents of the box. His absence, he reflected, would occasion remark, and it was very desirable just now that there should be nothing whatever in his conduct to furnish occasion for remarks. Prudence wrestled with Curiosity and threw her. Coming up nearer the house, he carefully hid the box, and dropping down again he threaded the shrubberies for some distance, and came into view again on another side of the house, as if he had come from Bagley Wood way. He was just in time for lunch, at which Cowp did not put in an appearance. It seemed he was not expected, having left word that he should be home for dinner. Mr. Digby Roy spent the greater part of the afternoon with Silas, on his favorite balcony.

“You know, I’d gladly give a hundred pounds to be out of it. Three hours of it. Good heavens, what am I to do with myself all the time?” said Silas, thinking of the morrow.

“Oh, it won’t be so bad as you fancy,” answered Mr. Digby Roy, dropping a laugh as brief as an exclamation.

“It isn’t as if I really knew these people, or had a pen’oth of interest in the whole lot. A man wants mannerism, and a bellyful of pretty empty phrases, to carry him decently through an ordeal like this.”

“All you need, Mr. Oldcastle, is to put out of your head altogether the idea that you have got to say or do anything—in par-

ticular. Fancy that your beautiful lawns are nothing but bits of fine meadow-land. You happen to be standing there, and they come by, clothed not exactly all in leather, or their costume might form an interesting topic of conversation, which under the circumstances it won't. They begin to compliment, and you begin to grin—only not too wide or too loud. How d'you do? And how d'you do? And how d'you do again?"

Silas laughed aloud, and managed to swallow half a mouthful of smoke, which set him coughing vigorously, after which he laughed louder than before.

"Is that all there is to it?"

"All, I assure you. You just keep as cool as a cucumber. Think of what a splendid crop of hay you are going to have this year, or of how many lambs you will have next spring, if they should all come poetically—that is, in couplets. Then you will be as safe as the Bank of England. You will do nothing really worth doing, say nothing really worth saying; in other words, you will play the English country-gentleman to the life."

"Nay, I shall never do that, I fear. The tone—"

"Ah, yes, the tone; you are right. I suppose I forgot that—which the English gentleman never does. One doesn't always catch it, to be sure, but then, you know, there are tones beyond the range of the ordinary human ear, and therefore inaudible. What is the next best thing to having the tone of a gentleman, would you say?"

"Is that a puzzle? If so, I give it up."

"No, it is not a puzzle; it is a problem, on the correct solution of which large issues frequently depend. I will tell you. The next best thing to having the tone of a gentleman is to provide yourself with a son, or a son-in-law, who has it."

"For example?"

"Oh, you know, self-praise is no recommendation," he said, laughing.

Silas joined him.

"Seriously, though," he said, "I'd give five hundred a year for a manner like yours that fitted me."

He might have been talking of a style of coat.

He added: "The way you sit down—the way you stand up—the way you put your hands in your pockets—the way you use your hands when they are not in your pockets, as if you didn't

know what it was to feel that you'd give anything on earth to know what to do with your ten fingers. The neat, cool, don't-care-a-d —sort of way you have of taking everything—drat it, it's tip-top, I think. Not but what Gaffer Bucket says, 'It's nowt but imperdence, marster, nowt but imperdence.' ”

Mr. Digby Roy blinked.

“ We will let it stand at that, then. Gaffer Bucket is an oracle, and oracles all the world over should be rare judges of impudence. Even so, be it what it may, it is a quality to be desired. So much you admit, I think?”

“ I repeat, I'd give five hundred a year for the like, that fitted me, you understand.”

“ Exactly. No one skin would fit two bodies. Unfortunately, it is something you cannot buy, no, not with rubies—at least, not at your time of life. Even if you had a son, nature, grace, and art would all have to combine and pull together in order to produce something that would pass current for the genuine coin. At bottom I know of but one receipt for turning out the thorough-bred—breeding, eh? You, as a stock-raiser, ought to know.”

“ You've hit it on the head, no doubt of that. Not all the training and feeding in creation will make up for blood. And if I may brag a bit, seeing we are on the matter of strain, my forebears had gentle blood in their veins—not, God knows, that I ever thought there would come a day when I should feel the need of falling back on that.”

He had struck the note of pride for an instant, only to fall back on what sounded like a note of shame.

“ Yet the day has come, eh?”

“ Yes, it has come. My personal integrity, my honor, my manhood—when I was poor these were my stay. Because of these I kept my back straight and my head up. Now, now they are like cornstalks. My character seems to lie prostrate, hidden and smothered under my wealth. Somehow, it seems to count for nothing much now, while the money and the money's worth weigh me down and make me feel ashamed of myself. Then it is that I have to fall back on my blood. ‘ You've gentle blood in you, you've gentle blood in you, you've gentle blood in you.’ I don't say it. It says itself, a hundred times over, till at last I feel I have got hold of something that— isn't a cornstalk. Something tough. Something that will do for a sneer, as a stoat will

do for a rat. I think of 'My lords, ladies, and gentlemen,' and don't mind them a bit. But if I give up 'blood' and turn to 'manhood,' I've no more strength in me than a baby."

"And you think it is very sad it should be so?"

"Sad!" exclaimed Silas. He rose to his feet, and, stretching out his hand, added, solemnly, "I call it a d——d shame, Mr. Roy."

The gentleman appealed to could not refrain from smiling.

"Well, yes," he said, slowly, "it is a bit odd, to be sure. But it is the way of the world, you see. The one thing that the world will not count of value is the one valuable thing in it—character. There is no merit in a man being born an earl. There is no merit in a man having a fine ancestry. Yet the world esteems them more highly than any virtues, any accomplishments."

"Copy-books don't—leastwise they didn't when I used them."

"Ah, no; copy-book morality, copy-book Christianity, is still pure and simple. It is meant for children, you know. Next to rank and descent comes money. This is the nearest approach to the real man that is permitted in the scheme of social value. But if the making of money presupposes certain qualities in the maker, we are not to suppose that it is the existence of these qualities that is recognized and honored. Nothing of the kind. It is not the man in the least, it is the money. So that it comes to this: society agrees to ignore personal qualities, virtues, accomplishments—in a word, the man. And it agrees to erect the criteria of social value in a region the most remote from actual personality. Essentials of a life are nothing; accidents are everything. In society such a thing as a soul, mortal or immortal, is a superfluity."

"And I say again, it's a d——d shame," quoth Silas.

"That depends upon how you value human nature. Of course, from the copy-book point of view, it is extremely odd. It suggests a race of people walking on their heads. If I were a bishop, for instance, I should not know whether to laugh or cry at the funny way in which my good Christian sheep played the part of silly pagan goats. Not being a bishop, having no prejudice against paganism, not being quite sure that the coronation of virtue and learning would not soon breed a tribe of kingly hypocrites, prigs, and pedants, the way of the world troubles me not. On the other hand, it does amuse me. I like fine comedy."

"I suppose a man must take the world as he finds it, but, Gad, I'm glad I'm not a bishop. That's all I have got to say."

"So am I. You would be inclined to treat things seriously. You would spoil the joke. You are better as you are—the master of Abbot's Hey. If you had only a son—"

"What?"

"You might not then have stood in so great a need of a son-in-law."

"To tell truth, I didn't know that I did need one—till you told me."

"But now do you doubt it?"

"What good would he be?"

"Not much, perhaps, but still some little. He might be of some slight assistance in the matter of providing an heir—a property like this should be entailed, and should carry your name with it."

"Never thought of it before. Yes, he might be of some use."

"A place like this should be managed in the grand style. It should work with the ease and rhythm of a mighty and perfect piece of mechanism. Everything complete and finished. Nothing obtrusive or ostentatious. Otherwise it is a discord, a botch, an insolent offence. The land is full of such social abortions. Insignificant plutocrats, ill-bred and mean of aspect, imbedded in huge establishments which they can neither dominate nor adorn. Systems that should be splendid and melodious, whereas they are flaring, harsh, and insolent. In a word—they need a son-in-law."

"That's true, Mr. Roy, that's true. I'd rather shut up the place and live in a cottage than live that piebald kind of life. It is neither black nor white. It is a mulatto brand."

"Fundamentally, they are vulgar; and refinement, good breeding, good form—in a word, gentility—breaks out upon them like a disease, in spots, in patches, in blotches. Rather than array yourself in this splendid squalor, this beggar's pomp of gentility, I believe you—you would hide yourself in a cottage. As a matter of fact, however, the cottage, in your case, is not practicable."

"Do you think it is necessary?" inquired Silas, with the air of a man who felt himself equal to making a sacrifice.

"No, it is not—at present."

"At present?"

"Yes. The strain has not come yet. Even to-morrow there

will be no strain—why? Because you and Mrs. Oldcastle have kindly allowed me to carry the burden. But a few opportunities of blundering seized—and people on ice, you know, find many chances of slipping—and the cottage would become desirable, if not practicable.”

“Humph, that’s what I’ve thought more than once. A son-in-law, you think, would prevent all this? Give tone? Work the thing like a barrel-organ, eh?”

“I catch your meaning distinctly, though the simile is—is damnable. Yes, a son-in-law would do all that, and much more.”

“Then I’ll get a son-in-law. How do you think our visitor here would do?”

“Strictly speaking, your visitor *here* would do first-rate. But—you have two visitors, I believe?”

Silas gave a hearty laugh.

“I mean, of course, our Yankee friend—don’t count you quite as a visitor, you know. He seems a nice sort of young man. Well off, too, isn’t he? I thought so. I don’t know what Madge thinks of him, but I’m pretty sure he’s about gone on—”

“For Heaven’s sake, Mr. Oldcastle, don’t talk such—such—pardon me—d——d nonsense. What if he is gone? Let him go to the—the pelicans, if he likes. Do you not see that he is a fool?”

“Never thought of looking for that. Of course I know you can always see the fool in a man if you care to look for it. I think it pretty well if a man can hide it so that it can’t be found without looking for. Don’t you?”

“The very idea of turning over a fine property like this to a foreigner, a Yankee—bah!”

“He has a big property of his own, I gather, and manages it pretty well.”

“Any fool can look after his own property, one would think. Think how he would run the place—like a raw millionaire, a bourgeois, a middle-class plutocrat, an emancipated tradesman. That is their idea of fine life. Superficial, crude, piebald. All the accidents and none of the essentials. Tone—good form—grand air—Jove! the thing is ridiculous. Rather than that, a thousand times, to the cottage, to the cottage, for Heaven’s sake!”

“Then whom would you recommend? There’s the young squire of Hepar, but he carries fool written on his face if ever a

man did. There's Lord Spongie's son, Dick. I like him. He was dead gone on women, so his father sent him into the bush. He has been in Queensland, on a sheep-run for two or three years. Just come back; looks like a bush-ranger. He's dead gone on sheep now. I like him. Do you think he would suit?"

"Not in the least."

"Why?"

"Because there is a better man in the field."

"Ah, do you say so? Who is that?"

"Myself."

"You! You marry Madge! You are joking."

"To-morrow I shall have the honor, Mr. Oldcastle, to solicit your permission to pay my addresses to your daughter."

"Does Margaret know?"

"Yes."

"Priscilla?"

"Yes."

"Rebecca?"

"I think not."

"Then I reckon I'll wait till she knows before I say anything about it," said Silas, in a significant tone.

CHAPTER XLI.

OF SITTING UP LATE AND GETTING UP EARLY.

A SOFTER dawn, a finer sunrise, a lovelier day, a bluer sky, a greener earth, 'twas never given mortal man to behold and enjoy. If the much-dreaded garden-party missed being a success, no blame could be attached to Nature. The garden was there, in the exquisite charm of earth, air, and sky. So much could Nature answer for. But for the party in its totality and its separate human items, Nature might very well beg to be excused the responsibility. Poetry and passion, wit bright and nimble, beauty adorable, and most divine tenderness she gave to birds and bees, to plants and grasses, to those winged flowers called butterflies, to the soft air-waves sweet as my lady's breath, to the

dark, passionate pine-woods with their new green love-locks, to the purple-red heather uplands across which ran the faint, and not far, untravelled road to the strange and solemn land where lay the cloud-mountains, white, silent, and mysterious, where dwelt the Immortals, whose godlike outlines could now and then be caught but never held by mortal eyes. When it came to the men and women, however, great-hearted ironic Nature drew the line, and closed her fist, and made dumb signs of exhausted energy as who should say, "'Twere a hopeless task, and I am weary."

Let us go back to the dawn, so ineffably soft, tender, delicate. It is the best part of most days. It is usually beautiful, even in England, so I have been told. It is so much wasted loveliness. But this particular dawn found three men and one woman wide awake, up, dressed, and out-of-doors. The woman was not a milkmaid, nor were the men engine-drivers, poachers, or policemen.

One of the men was Silas. He came through a little narrow door-way perched up in one of the angles of the open court-yard, descended a flight of stone steps, crossed the court-yard and under the wide entrance arch, and so to the small postern door, which he unlocked and went through. On the outside he relocked it, and put the key in his pocket. The white valley mists were all over the lowlands. The bottom woods were blotted out, only that the white acreage of mist was sown with brief tufts of fir and larch some inches high. In the eastern sky the adorable mystery was at work; the vesture of another day—unstained as yet—was being woven by the cunning fingers of the children of light. A day dead yet unstained they have never seen, yet their fingers never falter in the hope: the angels are a patient race.

Some fields away, in a corner of a large pasture, stood a stone building, properly a cattle-shed, but recently turned into a snug stable with a couple of stalls. Thither Silas took his way. As he unlocked the door there was a glad whinnying of horses and stamping of hoofs. He came out presently, driving with long reins a couple of sleek fat geldings. Crossing another pasture, they came to a pretty bit of gently-sloping land, five or six acres in extent, that was hedged in on two sides by woods, while a third side was bounded by the park land. It was entirely secluded and cut off from observation. Here Silas doffed his jacket, and changed his boots for a heavy hobnailed pair, which he fished out from a hiding-place in the hedge.

Half of the land, which was meadow, had been already turned up, and a turn-rest-plough stood in the furrow. To this he attached the horses, and with a cheery "Go on, my lads; gee up, Kingfisher, gee up, Diamond," Silas seized the stilts, and the plough went forward, cutting up the sod and turning over the rich, red-brown soil. He meant to put in three hours' work, and yet he forced the pace, for the garden-party was before him, and he had need of strength.

At the end of a couple of hours the pace had told. The horses were dripping with sweat, steaming and foam-flecked, but full of mettle; the game was fun while it lasted, and when it was over there was a fine currying for them, and a feed worth living for, and then nothing to do further but to kick their heels in some sweet pasture, and dream of the coming again of Silas. Not now was it "gee up," but "Steady, steady, Diamond. Quiet, Kingfisher, quiet, you rogues; you might be thinking it's a match; steady, there, steady." Coat and waistcoat were off, shirt-sleeves rolled up, hat on the back of his head, face all aglow, wet all through with perspiration, and the smell of the soil—the low, deep, strong aroma of life, of virtue, of sanity—in his nostrils, in his brain, in his heart, in his blood! It was glorious—second only to the joy of having fairly fought and fairly slain one's foe, man or beast.

This was the condition of the Squire of Abbot's Hey, as he stood at the turning of the furrow, mopping his face with his handkerchief, while a voice came out of the woods—"Good-morning, Squire. Is this the kind of medicine you take?"

Another of the sons of the morning was Mr. Digby Roy. He came out half an hour later than Silas, and from the other side of the house. He looked a bit demoralized, and felt as he looked. He had tumbled his bed about very carefully, but he had not slept in it, nor even lain on it. Pain had nothing to do with this wakefulness, nor conscience. Curiosity had much. When Cowp retired to his room early in the evening, on plea of a headache, of course Mr. Digby Roy knew it was a blind; still he was not at all displeased to have him out of the way. It left the coast clear for the bringing in of the treasure-trove.

Some time later he strolled out, wrapped in a great fur coat with capacious pockets. He passed round the house, noiselessly, treading on the greensward. Under Cowp's window he halted,

and looked up. The moon was still low down, and heavy clouds were overhead, threatening rain. But Mr. Digby Roy had cat's eyes, and could see in the dark. So he put out his hand and seized it; he examined it closely, testing its strength with both hands: it was a slender rope-ladder, weighted at the bottom with lead, and hanging through Cowp's window to the ground. He thought he had already started, but on taking another point of observation he saw Cowp's shadow reflected on the blind. When he found his treasure all right he slipped it into one of his capacious pockets, and went in-doors and up-stairs. He did not go down again. He fastened his door, put out his lights, opened his windows, and sat with his head outside.

Five windows away hung the rope-ladder; he could not see it, but he was sure he would be able to see a human figure pass down and up it. Half the descent was hidden by the intervening balcony, but that in its turn would tend to conceal his projecting head. The wind was in his favor, so he smoked. The clock in the central tower gave tongue time and time again; the moonlight came and went as the black scudding clouds, driven by an upper wind, opened and closed. Mr. Digby Roy's patience was getting exhausted.

"The beggar's gone to sleep, I verily believe . . . funk'd it perhaps . . . afraid of spooks . . . if I were he I should— Ah! at last . . . his window opening . . . softly, sir, softly . . . so . . . so . . . Gad, he goes down like a monkey or . . . a sailor . . . safe and sound . . . ta ta, mein Herr . . . dig bravely, dig deep, dig like the devil . . . Ugh! a round O . . . too bad, too bad . . . something was but nothing is . . . Cape Cod calls thee . . . git, yer varmint! git!"

He closed the window, lighted a lamp, and, pulling the treasure from his leather trunk, began to examine it. A slight noise by the window caused him to start slightly. He thrust the box quickly back into the trunk.

"A bat attracted by the light, probably . . . getting nervous it seems . . . cautious . . . a man who carries a rope-ladder in his trunk might . . . monkey tricks . . . better see him safely home . . . then . . ."

He extinguished the lamp, reopened the window, and began his vigil. It seemed long, terribly long. He must have dozed. Was that a footstep, or a cough? He was wide-awake now, his heart

thumping against his ribs. He peeped cautiously out, and was just in time to see Cowp mount a few rungs and scramble in through his window. Then the ladder was drawn in, and the window softly closed.

"I'd give twenty pounds to see how he looks . . . twenty more for his thoughts . . . a pony for his feelings . . . so bland and yet so subtle . . . so simple and yet so 'cute. . . . Gad, if I hadn't happened to have brought him down here . . . if I hadn't happened to have found out that he had been here before. . . . What the deuce could have put him on the track? . . . he is dead gone on her . . . if my lady *sans conscience, sans imagination*, had only the wit to take the bit between her teeth . . . take him into her confidence . . . make her own terms . . . defy me . . . by George, I won't think it out . . . unlucky . . . get into their noddles maybe . . . how? don't happen to know . . . wish I did . . . true, though."

Gently he closed the window, and, this time, the inside shutter too; then he relit a couple of lamps, brought forth again his treasure-trove, and, sitting down, examined it carefully. How to open it? None of his keys fitted the padlock. A small poker lay in the fender, half an inch of its end slipped through the staple. A quick wrench, and off flew staple and lock. For the next hundred minutes Mr. Digby Roy was oblivious of time.

Conrad Twigg had gone to no little trouble to preserve the records of his identity for the sake of his boy. The contents of the box were: a little pen-and-ink sketch of his mother's head and bust; a silhouette of himself; a copy of his parents' marriage register, together with a copy of his own baptismal register; a signet ring engraved with the crest and motto of the family; a gold snuffbox of antique design, with the same heraldic adornment on the lid, inside of which was the inscription—*Conrad Twigg from his loving mother*; a small Bible containing, in an old-time feminine handwriting, *Conrad, from his mother with her love and prayers*; a memorandum reminding his son where the records of his parents' marriage and of his own birth were to be found; a will duly drawn, signed, and witnessed, made in London just two-and-twenty years earlier, and beginning thus: "In the name of God, amen. I, Conrad Twigg, otherwise known as Harold Crook, now residing at Piupetaw, Wyoming, United States of America, a British subject, and being in good health and

full possession of all my faculties." It was short and to the point: it devised everything to his son Cornelius, known as Cornelius Crook Cowp. To the will was pinned a note to the effect that the document in question was a true copy, of which the original was in possession of Messrs. Seesall and Holdtyte, which honorable firm still exists to this day, as all the world knows.

There followed a paper carefully setting forth the identity of the writer, illustrated by a skilful and most elaborate genealogical tree. Finally, another paper, autobiographic in character, setting forth sundry passages in the life of Conrad Twigg. It was worth all the rest, many times over. It was written by a father to his much-loved lad. It is worth its weight in gold—I use the present tense, for I have the document now in front of me. Perhaps I am foolish; it would do small injury to any now alive, and yet I cannot bring myself to transcribe that narrative, so brief, fragmentary, and elusive, and yet so full of quaint humor, of delicious irony, of moving tenderness, of pathos, of wisdom, and of—yes, piety. Backwoods piety, if you will, but as real, as pungent, as wholesome as the smell of the pines.

One passage in it struck Mr. Digby Roy strongly. As it happened, it was the passage dealing with the "one dreadful and shameful secret" in the dead man's life, to undo which, as we know, he had already told his son he would have given his heart's blood. The family legend, as before mentioned, was that Conrad Twigg had fled the country to avoid arrest, as one of a band of skilful forgers. This was vague enough, but sufficient for the purpose of family disgrace. Here are a few of Twigg's sentences on this disastrous episode:

"It was in London I met her. I was a young fool loose in town. I fell in love with her. She had but one defect—a husband. Her hair was golden, her eyes a dark-brown like her eyelashes, her face was a perfect picture, music was in her voice, grace in her movements, infinite charm in her manner. She was young, she was tender, she was a Countess, she made me believe she loved me. I adored her. I was her slave, and, I must confess, her tool. I did not like her husband, Count P., which was perhaps natural, yet he was unquestionably a gentleman, and he did not intrude himself when his absence was more desired than his presence. She gave me the bag filled with foreign securities worth about two hundred thousand pounds.

“ ‘They belong to the Count and three of his friends. You would serve me?’

“ ‘I would die for you,’ I answered.

“ ‘Ah, you impetuous boy, live for me. Guard them, conceal them. We are in danger.’

“ ‘In danger? What do you mean?’

“ ‘Did you not hear of the great bank robbery at ——?’

“ ‘Certainly. All the police of Europe are on the look out for the thieves. I never read anything more audacious, cleverer.’

“ She smiled like an angel as she said, ‘It was my scheme. I found the wit, and they the nerve. They are all there in the bag. For my sake you will take care of it, will you not? Ah, you foolish fellow, you stare like one—how shall I say?—*wie toll?* Drink this wine, so; and this, so; now you will be my own—never mind what. Yes, I will give you a promise. When you bring me back the bag all safely, then will I put my arms round your neck and I will give you—all you care to take.’

“ That did it. I took the bag. Two days later the police were on my track. I bolted to Paris, where the Countess had gone the day before, and there I was taken in no time. They also captured the Countess and two confederates; but two slipped through their fingers, of which two one was the Count. I stood my trial with the rest at Vienna. The evidence was damning, but the plunder had vanished, and the police could find no clew to its whereabouts. The truth is, nobody knew but myself. They hit us hard. The two men got twenty-five years apiece in close confinement, the Countess fifteen years, while I was let off with ten years’ imprisonment, of which term two years were to be spent in solitary confinement.

“ Three months of it was quite enough for me; I should soon have been stark mad, I believe. Supposing I knew where the plunder was, and delivered it up, what effect would that have on my sentence? When I first put it to the governor of the prison he opened his mouth wide but made no remark, thinking me mad, I fancy. In a fortnight I got an answer to my question. They would knock off five years. Finding them open to a bargain, I began to haggle. In three months longer I got another three years knocked off, together with a less vile hole to live in while the negotiations were proceeding. Then I turned the subject somewhat by asking what effect it would have on the sen-

tence of the Countess? Then the fun began, and the fury. They pitched me back again into the vile sty of a dungeon I had at first. It took me six woful months to do it, but in the end I got ten years of her sentence knocked off. To be sure, it was on condition that I stayed in five years instead of two, but that is neither here nor there. Then I gave up my secret, and the booty was nearly all recovered.

“After that I felt better in my mind, and settled down for four long years more of dreadful imprisonment. Instead of four years, however, it lasted just four months, and no more; I call that imperial clemency. I never saw the Countess again, and never wanted to.

“This, my son, is my secret—this my shame. Since God sent me you, my boy, I have tasted the full bitterness of my disgrace. I fell below my rank as gentleman. Oh, my boy, my boy, it is like fire in my bosom. To be an English gentleman, stainless and without reproach, my boy, is to have some merit in the sight of Heaven. And to believe the same and act on it may God help you!”

CHAPTER XLII.

OF THE SAME AS BEFORE AND SOMETHING ELSE.

MR. DIGBY ROY sat and chewed the cud of reflection for some time.

“Now is my enemy delivered into my hand . . . his father . . . more a libertine than a criminal, though . . . still, a convict . . . think of that, Sir Millionaire . . . I know it, I can prove it, I will proclaim it if . . . I have him at my mercy . . . sensitive . . . proud . . . ‘My father was an English gentleman,’ ha, ha! . . . fine gentleman . . . a gentleman convict . . . he thinks he is winning all along the line . . . he is dead gone on her; and she . . . d—— her; no, no, I don’t mean that . . . she doesn’t love me, that is certain . . . what a find! . . . where should I have been now . . . I shiver . . . wonder what he is thinking now . . . sooner it’s known and he clears out the better, I say.”

He put away the things very carefully, looked at his watch,

whistled his surprise, opened his shutters, and went quietly downstairs and let himself out. Three miles away was the Scarthin, and Mr. Digby Roy wisely judged that a swim in its classic waters would be just the thing to set him on his feet for the day. He dropped down into the white motionless mist, full of confidence that Nature had played no pranks in the night, and that the valley was still there below. He might have been walking into deep water from the way the mist rose about him with each step he took. For a moment nothing but his head was visible, floating apparently on a cloudy sea. Another step, and the head was gone; swallowed up, drowned in fog. We cannot follow him through the opaque medium. An hour later Gaffer Bucket unlocked the postern door through which Silas had passed, and let out Cowp. He carried a gun under his arm, and thought in a friendly way of the rabbits at which he was going to pop. He would not have hurt one of them for anything, he only wanted to shoot them. He looked at the sun on a level with his eyes, and took off his cap. It was a little habit of his thus to greet the morning's lord bareheaded. He struck off into the woods.

Poor Cowp! Since his return from his midnight expedition he had been hard at work—cleaning his spade! That wonderful spade of wrought steel, in three separable parts, warranted to dig a hole into the middle of creation without bending or breaking. He had so identified it with his purpose and destiny that he had read into it something of dumb intelligence, fidelity, and sympathy. It had gone through the ordeal with him, done its duty, and failed only as its owner failed. It was sorely scratched and bruised, but polishing powder and elbow-grease had done much to restore it to its pristine brightness. But what powder and grease were there to restaurate its owner?

Mr. Digby Roy would have suggested his omnipotent millions; just now, however, Cowp held his millions very lightly. He would have gladly surrendered them all for the "little iron box" with its precious documents. His millions seemed to mock him. He had fed his imagination with the generous thought that he was the son of an English gentleman. He had dyed his nature in the belief. It had come to stand for the climate of his being, the green earth, the blue sky, the deep earth-charm. There was romance in it, there was love, there was pride, there was magnanimity. It endowed him with affluence and dignity of nature. It

did not make him less American—why should it? But it did impart a love of English character, English tradition, English life. His millions were neither American, nor English, nor French, nor Chinese, nor Patagonian. What were these without a name, a family, a pedigree, a history? To be somebody and poor was infinitely more in his eyes than to be nobody and rich. To this extent of his vision he could scarcely be counted a son either of modern England or America.

How he had dug! With what energy, with what hope, with what doubt, with what despair! Mr. Digby Roy's hole was as an acorn's cup to a duck's egg compared with his. When he found the two large flat stones and nothing between them, his heart sank.

"It was there. It has gone," he murmured, with reeling brain. He dug on in wild, blind, hopeless hope. Then he turned away, faint and weary, and gave no thought to the great trench and the heaps of soil. Who had been there before him? Who was the thief? Was there any hope of his ever finding out? He thought of his millions—they should flow like water. They said money could do anything: if money could restore what he had lost, he would pour it out by the keful, by the hogshead. He seemed to find pleasure in speaking, or, rather, thinking, of the precious metal in terms and images of scornful disrespect. He met mockery with scorn. He was hard hit. The dream of a life melted clean away. His fondest hope shattered to atoms. Nothing, in fact, left. Was that indeed so? Nothing left? Why, then, this morning stroll to pull himself together? Why this gentle sportsmanlike interest in the rabbits in the woods? Something did remain, after all. Something that nestled in his bosom, touched his heart, sent the blood like wine along his veins, and made melody in his brain.

"Margaret, thou art now my all, my all," he ejaculated, half aloud.

A rabbit heard him, and, following its trail after its witless way, sped down the path in front of him, and paid the penalty. As Cowp picked up his rabbit he was happy. Thus are all things knit together in life and death, and the fabric is patterned with comedy on one side and tragedy on the other.

Some time later he found himself on the edge of the wood, where a piece of sloping grassland cut the wood almost in two—a splendid feeding-ground for rabbits. Cautiously he peeped

through the hedge. There were no rabbits visible, but, instead, a couple of sweating horses standing, a plough behind them, and a ploughman between the stilts, wiping his face with his handkerchief. As he caught a glimpse of that well-known face, he came near dropping his gun, so great was his astonishment.

"I never thought to see that in Old England. A rich country squire driving his own plough. It would mean something even among us, in the Eastern States. Here, in Old England, it means—well, what does it mean? I say it means grit—grit, the coarse part of meal, the unground wheat. Fine meal, good flour, should have no grit. Yet our metaphorical grit is good. Even it has in it, though, the quality of roughness. Is the unstrained element good? Which is the higher type of man, the squire who can plough but cannot dance, or the squire who can dance but cannot plough? Silas Oldcastle is not a gentleman, and yet he is a gentleman. Many other squires are gentlemen, and yet they are not gentlemen. Grit is good. You cannot beat fine meal, though. Is this snobbery, I wonder? Well, I guess it is. To be half afraid of backing the gentleman for fear of being called a snob—that is snobbery of the baser sort, mob snobbery."

He lifted up his voice.

"Good-morning, Squire. Is this the kind of medicine you take?"

Startled and guilty was the look that came over his face as Silas glanced quickly round. He was relieved when he saw Cowp push through the hedge and jump the fence. Sir Bulward Kinver's woods touched his own; they had arranged to breed birds in common, and the baronet made free use of the Abbot's Hey woods. Silas, like many other folk, had more practical wisdom than moral courage; for people are less fools than cowards. He did not relish the idea of Sir Bulward coming upon him at the plough-tail. But Cowp was a different kind of man. An American had no right to be supercilious, not with an Englishman at any rate. We know the feeling; we all have it, more or less, regarding all English-speaking foreigners, Colonials or Americans. The artisan shares it with the earl. It is the instinct of imperialism running tandem with the instinct of parochialism. The Englishman who bemocks it does but put a fool's finger to the nose of his own image in the glass.

"This is a surprise. I shouldn't have credited you with the ability to drive a furrow like that."

"I'd like to see the man in this parish that could beat me," remarked Silas, with a ground-note of pride.

"Do you do much of it?"

"Not so much as I should like."

"For your health, I suppose?"

"Yes—of mind."

"Of mind?" repeated Cowp, and laughed.

"The two chief things are self-respect and a good liver. Some men get them by knocking about all over the earth; others by cultivating horses and dogs and guns. I hold by the plough and the up-turned soil. Sniff it now—it's the smell of life, to my thinking. It was Rebecca's notion though, not mine. There's brains in that woman, Mr. Cowp, enough to stock a big family. Two or three hours behind the plough makes a man of you for twenty-four hours anyway. I'm like a leaky tub, and want filling just so often. Don't you?"

"No, I can't say that I do. I should like to try my hand—may I?"

"With all the pleasure in the world."

Silas stepped aside and handed Cowp the reins.

"No, thank you. I will trouble you to manage the horses."

Cowp siezed the handles, Silas gave the word, and off they went. It was like a ship in a heavy sea. The plough pitched forward, stem down, stern up; then it was stern down and stem up, next a roll on the starboard, followed by one on the port side. Once and again Diamond and Kingfisher deliberately stopped, turned their heads round, pricked their ears, and gazed wonderingly at Cowp.

"It's all right, lads, though it's all wrong. You get along and mind your own business, and don't make rude remarks. Gee up you rogues," quoth Silas; and on they went.

And Cowp stuck to the stilts like a man, and kept his feet, and was pulled along. At the end of the furrow men and horses turned round and surveyed the result. Cowp's face was awry, so was Silas's, so were the horses'. It was funny, they all thought.

"Talking about self-respect, I guess ploughing would soon kill it in me," remarked Cowp, sadly.

"It looks as if a mighty big worm had corkscrewed himself across the land," observed Silas, taking the bearings of what should have been a furrow, with one eye shut.

"I feel as if the horses despised me. Do you think they do? Just look at that fellow's nostril, if it is not turned up I'm a red Indian."

He pointed to Kingfisher.

"It is pity, my dear sir, not scorn. They are sorry that your education has been so neglected. I reckon we had better go home now, and have a bit of breakfast."

On the way thither Silas said, "You needn't say anything inside about what I have been doing. They pretend not to know, and I pretend they don't know. I'm not sure at all that Priscilla does know."

They were all present at the breakfast-table, except Mr. Digby Roy. He came in before long, dressed with his usual neatness, looking remarkably fresh and well, and full of high spirits. He sang the praises of the Scarthin, and solemnly affirmed that he chased a beautiful trout under the water and caught it between two stones. In honor of the event, he let it go again, which he was now inclined to regret, since he had fallen among sceptics who cried, "Show us the fish!" Another time he would bring home the fish, and the stones, and the—no, he could not do that: they would have to dispense with the river.

All the while he was studying Cowp: looking for wounds, bruises, symptoms of fever, notes of defeat. He found none. This was pluck, he thought, and deserved recognition. He proceeded to confer it.

They were half through breakfast when he said, "Oh, I have something to tell you. I had almost forgotten it. One of the oddest things I ever heard of. It isn't a ghost-story, though it is almost as bad. On my way home this morning I came through the church-yard. Standing near the Twigg sarcophagi, as I prefer to call them, Mrs. Oldcastle—sounds well, you know—was a group of villagers."

He sipped his coffee and glanced at Cowp. That gentleman had dropped his knife on the carpet, and for some moments his face became invisible as he bent to pick it up.

"Ah, yes. What about them, pray?" exclaimed Priscilla, with an interest suddenly grown warm.

"I heard them chattering like magpies before I could see them. When they saw me the chatter suddenly ceased, and they all stared at me. I thought that odd, so I marched towards them. 'Well,

what is it, wedding, christening, or burial, that brings you all out here so early?" A dozen found their tongues at the same moment. "It was neither. It was *that*." They stood aside and pointed at—THAT."

He wanted another cup of coffee with a little less sugar this time. And for this trifle he actually stopped his narrative, just when every one at the table had clean forgotten their breakfast altogether. He seemed inclined to keep it stopped, too, until he had received his precious coffee.

"You provoking man! Do go on. How can I serve out coffee until I know what 'That' was?"

"Dear Mrs. Oldcastle, I have not forgotten the other evening. Your nervous system is hardly robust as yet. Unless I get my coffee first, who knows if I shall get it at all? Ha, already poured? One lump, please, and cream *ad libitum*. Now am I safe. You are good at—mysteries, Cowp. Guess what 'That' was!"

Cowp gave him a clear, steady look for some seconds, then he shook his head and said, with a laugh, "This morning you are the mystery-monger. Go ahead; I don't care to compete."

"I looked and saw, in the first place, a lot of soil, heaps of it—say a cart-load. That suggested a grave. I looked for it in vain. 'It's in there, sir, there.' And sure enough, it was there."

Another pause.

"Where?" asked Priscilla, in a tone of midnight horror.

"Between the second and third of the Twigg sarcophagi."

His tone was pitched to match Priscilla's. A running fire of exclamations followed. Only one laugh; and it seemed so ill-timed as to smack of bad taste or of irreligion; he did not know which, or even if it was not both—so thought the culprit Cowp: he was not a bold man evidently.

"Why, what on earth does it mean? I must look after this. What's the use of being a J. P. if one cannot defend the family tombs?" quoth Silas.

"No need to hurry, Mr. Oldcastle. The parson and the churchwardens and the sexton, and I know not whom besides, will be here shortly to lay the case before you. I stipulated for breakfast first, and midnight mysteries after. It looks like an attempt to break into one or both of the tombs. Don't you think so?"

The question was thrown across the table at Cowp, who took

it up cautiously, with the inquiry, "What motive could there be?"

"Ha, of course that is the difficulty. Perhaps robbery, perhaps a search for some treasure supposed to be hidden there."

"Were the tombs themselves at all disturbed, or only the neighboring ground?" Cowp asked, with a judicial air.

"I think the tombs were not opened. I imagine the sacrilegious scamps were disturbed at their work. The fun of the thing was, a farm hand present, somebody's wagoner, I think, though I forget his master's name, said that yesterday morning he was in the adjoining field and—"

"A big fellow with sandy whiskers?" cried Silas.

"Yes; wearing a smock-frock, with what struck me was a most beautifully worked yoke to it."

"I know him. Tom Spendlove, wagoner to Farmer Blackwall at Rakeway, one of my tenants. The field is part of his holding. Well, what did Tom say?"

"He happened to pass the stile leading into the church-yard, and hearing a step, he looked over, and saw, at least he says he saw, a—"

"Tom Spendlove is an honest fellow enough. I would take his word any day," threw in Silas, magisterially.

"Then honest Tom saw a man, a stranger, 'a foreign lookin' kind o' chap,' to use his own expression, standing by the Twigg sarcophagi. He watched him for some minutes, and saw him measuring with a stick the distance from the big yew opposite to one of the tombs. The stranger happened to turn his head, so Tom the Honest drew back, and went on his way and thought no more about it. That is his story; but I confess I think it a day-dream."

"Would he be able to recognize the stranger if he saw him?" asked Cowp.

"I asked him that, and he swore he would," replied Mr. Digby Roy.

"Awkward for the foreign lookin' kind o' chap," responded Cowp, elevating his eyebrows.

CHAPTER XLIII.

OF JANET'S HIDING BEHIND THE GORSE-BUSH.

To the dawn again we must return.

Francisca, Countess of Eden, was something of a fire-worshipper, a tolerably safe form of worship when the sun is the great symbolical object of divinity, seeing that there is little danger of him dissipating, by his too frequent appearance, the sentiment of mystery and veneration that is fed by invisibility. Her solar proclivities were sufficiently strong to shape a piece of her conduct, if not to mould a feature of her character: they determined the arrangement of the furniture of her sleeping apartment. That was something. An imperious system of historic and dogmatic belief could hardly do more, perhaps. She slept with her head to the west. Rising, she had only to look straight in front of her, through the low, wide window, to behold the sky-line of the dark moors quiver with the coming light, that came like a running flood of color, overspreading the grim uplands and burying them under continents of glory, great seas, and broad-based mountains of beauteous light.

She had not been many hours in bed. Her sleep had been light, broken, and troubled with interpolated dreams that seemed like snatches of horrible discord, sudden thunder-claps, bits of jagged tragedy, that cuts one's nerves asunder, or fragments of grisly horror, freezing the blood.

The art of dreaming was scarcely a humane invention. When we are awake we can get on pretty well with ourselves, having learned how to jockey ourselves. But in sleep we catch it, if there is anything to be caught. Then the rich man lives over again his poverty, and the brave man his cowardice, and the righteous man his hypocrisy, and the great feels the pinch of his smallness. We open our eyes—no, we are not in perdition after all, nor yet in Paradise, which would be almost as bad. We are still safe and sound on that dear old humbug of a planet, Earth, and

we murmur "Thank God, it was only a dream!" Only a dream? A bit of our past selves risen from the dead—and only a dream!

Francisca, years ago, used to have these dreams. They died away, however, and for some years her sleep had been sweet.

The day had broken. Francisca arose. Half an hour later she was out of doors, in a deep, sandy lane, with hedges high over her head. The under gravel had worn away, leaving the roots and their upper layer of soil projecting over the road like eaves. Most of the time she was walking with a roof of roots above her head. Looking up and seeing them, she gave a slight start and came out into the middle of the lane. She might have reflected that the roots of things generally are above us. But the sight of roots overhead, interlaced and hanging down, struck her disordered nerves on the side of the fantastic and fearful. She felt herself within the shadow of a strange and weird underworld. It was a relief to get out onto the open meadow-land, to skirt the hanging woods, to cross the nimble-footed streams, to thread the rock-walled dells, to climb the swelling hills, the baby Alps, fir-crowned or naked rock or carpeted with grass, long, beautiful, and innutritious, or close, brown-red, and succulent.

On the top of one of these lovable little impostors, ant-hills posing proudly as Himalayas, the Countess rested. A little below her were the chimneys and towers of Abbot's Hey, mellow as the beauty of the beeches they overtopped. And yonder, almost at the end of that high-standing wall of foliage encircling the park, curled a little column of smoke that showed blue against the background of trees. That was Parkside Cottage, where David Reed lived, with his daughter, Janet. Thither was Francisca bound. Meanwhile she had halted, not to rest herself, for she was not tired; but because her mind had halted and went not onward. Last night Janet had been to see her, but she was out, dining at Pallas Towers. It was late when she returned to Wigwell Grange, and found a note from Janet upon her dressing-table. She read it, and—the night followed, and the morning. Now she read it again for the twentieth time.

"Dear Lady Eden,—I am so sorry not to have seen you. My head is on fire. I have seen HIM. I am sure it was he. He is seeking me. If he finds me—Oh, God forbid he ever should!—

"Ever in gratitude yours, Janet Reed."

That was all, and it was more than enough. *I have seen him*—it went through her like an electric discharge. *Him* meant Philip Tuer of the Carpathian Mountains, of the great pine-forests, of the sad story of the little lady no bigger than a big white crane. Philip Tuer, the man for whom she had sinned, for whom she had suffered, for whom she had made others suffer. Philip Tuer, who had given her love sweet and tender when her nature was starved and dying for want of it. These were impressions graven on her heart, and not to be obliterated by time or circumstance. There were later impressions, too, not so pleasant; cut deep were they also. These latter impressions were tombstone carvings that conceal themselves under lichen and moss, or crumble and fall away as quickly as the memory of their dead fails among the living. Not so the former. These were the lovers' knots and fond initials cut in the bark of the sapling, and destined to grow with its growth, and last until what time the axe is laid to the root of the tree.

Little did Janet Reed (as she signed herself not wisely) dream of the effect that her note would have upon her adorable Countess, so good, so noble, so famed for her beauty and her wisdom and her generosity, to whom she and her father owed—ah, what did they not owe? When David Reed was threatened with arrest and imprisonment, the Countess stood forth alone his friend and champion. To save him she wrote her signature I know not how many times to how many papers, and swore as it were by bell, book, and candle, in vile, lawyer-English—an idiom that would disgrace a tribe of mortals that had to wriggle through life on their bellies like serpents—that she would never, never, never seek to recover from the bank the value of the lost jewels. From that day on, David Reed was under her care, and lacked nothing. He called her Francisca, the Magnanimous, the Blessed Lady, the Great-hearted Countess. Nevertheless, when a man is broken he is broken, and patching and piecing is of small avail. The wholeness has gone out of him, and with the virtue the value.

That Philip Tuer, being his father's son, had had a slight social acquaintance with the Countess previous to his marriage with Janet was known to father and daughter. Of the rest they knew nothing, guessed nothing, dreamed nothing. And by the same token Janet was in blissful ignorance that the threads of her own and Francisca's destiny were web and woof of one fabric.

Francisca sat for some time buried in reflection, then she rose and went back by the way she came. On the lawn, playing with half a dozen big dogs, was a small edition of the Countess rising twelve; the image of her mother, save in her eyes, which were a deep blue, exceeding beautiful, and wondrously like some other eyes we have seen. This was that wonderful baby Muriel, "all mother and no father." Had she only been a boy instead of a girl, who knows what might have happened? The Earl desired a boy, an heir; he did not exactly deserve one, but still she could have won his love, perhaps, by such an offering.

Francisca sighed, and entered the house unseen by Muriel. She sent a note to Parkside Cottage by a groom, and Janet came to her, and the two women whose fates were so blended were together alone. They were much of an age, with the same color of hair and eyes; they were both beautiful women still, but with a difference. Janet suggested a flower plucked, Francisca a flower rooted in the soil. The one had broken her connection with the sources of vitality; the other seemed to have tapped the secret reservoirs of life. This one chastened, that one vigorous, piquant, brilliant. Janet was dressed with exquisite neatness and simplicity, but the Countess was a stately picture of fashionable and delicate loveliness. Janet was not so tall as Francisca. The supreme charm of a woman is manner, not beauty. The women immortal, invincible, and terrible in their power to kill or to make alive, were, are, always will be women of manner; never mere women of beauty. Janet had manner; but as the skimming of a swallow to the flight of an eagle, so was her manner to Francisca's. Yet even so, Janet as a countess would have been one of the sweetest of those charming creatures.

"You say you saw him?"

"Yes, I saw him. He passed within a few feet of me."

"And he did not see you?"

"No. I saw him coming down the hill by the church when he was a hundred yards or more away. I thought I should faint. I knew him in a moment. I drew back, and hid myself behind a large tree and a gorse-bush."

"How did he look? Was he much altered?"

"Stouter, older of course, and he wore a beard, but—if he had been dressed as a woman or a Turk, I should have known him instantly."

"It is very strange. He was probably only passing through the village, on a walking expedition. You know, he was always fond of walking in the old—"

She did not finish the sentence, and Janet saw her face suddenly dyed with a hot blush. Whereat she wondered, but with no gleam of divination.

"He didn't walk like one on a tramp. He sauntered—his old saunter—as if he had come out after breakfast for a stroll. I feel sure he is staying somewhere in the neighborhood."

"Perhaps so. You do not think he is looking for you?"

"He is, I am sure."

"But he thinks you dead, does he not?"

"But I am not. He might have learned the truth. He will be sure to hear of us."

"If your father had taken my advice and changed his name—"

"Oh, I wish he had. Nothing could ever induce him to do that though."

"Do you wish me to do anything?"

"I want to get away from here at once; but there is father. I dare not tell him the reason, it would excite him too much. He hates to move away from home. New people, new places distress him. But your wish, as you know, dear Lady Eden, is his law. Oh, do help me, please."

"Are you quite sure, Mrs. Tuer—"

"Don't, please, oh, don't. You never called me that before. I am Janet, Janet Reed."

"Ah, but facts are facts, my friend. You are the wife of Phil—of your husband. You think you are sure of yourself? You think you really do not ever again wish to—to live with your husband?"

"Never, never!"

"Your love for him is dead?"

"Dead."

"Poor woman! From my heart I pity you. You loved him once, surely?"

Janet was struggling hard to keep down her emotion. Francisca drew near to her, and took hold of her hand, and dropped words of sympathy, a precious balm.

Later she said: "Do you mind telling me what it was that killed your love for him? Not if it would pain you very much. I am interested, deeply interested in you and—yours."

Janet told her all. And at the conclusion Francisca said without saying unto herself, "I knew it all along, and yet it has not killed—made me hate him. Why am I so different from her?"

Meanwhile at Abbot's Hey circumstance was cutting the capers of a court-jester. The church-yard incident had spread a wave of hardly repressed excitement throughout the household. Breakfast over, Silas sought his pipe without delay, expecting every moment to have to lay it down on the arrival of parson and church-wardens.

Mr. Digby Roy betook him to his favorite balcony, and sucked the double pleasure of pipe and reflection. His thoughts were pleasant, very. It was so neatly done, so naturally; there was not a trace of stratagem, of manœuvre, of conspiracy to be seen. Yet it was a piece of artful work through and through, partly humorous, partly malicious, altogether ironical, and fit for a play. It showed the advantage of presence of mind, nimble dexterity in seizing sudden opportunity. One thing had played into another like a piece of mechanism, wheel within wheel. One word and a nod, and the sexton had understood as by inspiration that Mr. Digby Roy's visit to the church must be entirely obliterated from his remembrance. Instantly he had forgotten all about it; he seemed to see it visibly take its departure, as the old man's face grew blank as a gray sky, and his eyes emptied themselves of every gleam of intelligence: it was a lesson never to neglect a chance of making a man your man.

Then, when honest Tom Spendlove, from the energy and vividness of having actually seen the violator of tombs with his own eyes, was on the verge of sinking back into the placid impotence and insipidity of confessed ignorance of what the man was like, how cleverly he had propped him up, drawn him with leading questions, stimulated his memory, or invention, with fragments of personal details, until Honest Tom beheld an image clearly, and recognized it, and was prepared to identify its fleshly presentment. And all so delicately done under their noses, before their eyes, that not one of the group of rustics was conscious of the doing or the doer. They were ready to a man to swear that Tom Spendlove had told it all from the start, straight out, without halt or help. And perhaps the last man to entertain any doubt or scruple on the subject was Tom himself. Yes, it was undeniably clever.

Then his full, sonorous, indignant protest, "Why, God bless me, man, you might as well say right out that it was my friend, Mr. Cowp, from America, who is with me at the Hall! I would advise you to be a little more guarded in your statements. You must be dreaming, sir!"

It was delicious. How the deuce was he going to get out of it? Honest Tom would spot him the moment he saw him. "That's 'im ; tak' me Bible oath on it, that's 'im," he could hear Tom say, with the gravity and pugnacity of a bull-dog. What would Cowp say? What do? He would not miss it for the world. To make sure, his pipe now empty, he went within, and was just in time to see the vicar enter the front hall, while half the parish seemed behind him, in the door-way and the court-yard.

CHAPTER XLIV.

OF GAFFER BUCKET ON THE BOX-SEAT.

GAFFER BUCKET heard the news early. He always did. News flew to him as a dove to its cote. Other folk had to run hither and thither, and multiply questions. Gaffer Bucket disdained to hurry; he moved along slowly, opened his ears, eyes, and mouth, and news soaked into him as water into a sponge. When the breakfast-bell rang he set off for the church-yard. He went through the park; it was longer, but it was more dignified. So he missed Mr. Digby Roy, who came by way of the plantation. By the time he had reached the excited crowd of men, women, and children who buzzed round the Twigg tombs he had very little to learn. The bees of fact and fancy swarmed and hummed about him, and deposited their treasure as in a hive.

Arrayed in the devout dignity of broadcloth, and comporting himself as became the Squire's squire, Bucket advanced as the crowd parted, and surveyed the mounds of upthrown earth, the hole large enough for a young child's grave. There was silence while he made his observations. He gazed round, so intently and deliberately scanning the faces about him that a sudden shakiness fell upon the folk, as the idea passed without a word

from one to each, from each to all, that he was searching out the culprit from among themselves. Was it possible? Was it not probable? Was it not, all things considered, all but certain? That unanimous and confidential-crowd of rustics ceased in a flash to be compact as a mass of clay, and grew suddenly loose as light soil, and soon became as running sand. They drew back, they opened out, they shot suspicious glances at one another; half a dozen heads drooped, and as many more looked guilty enough to be hanged. A couple of laborers sneaked off without more ado. A woman giggled, and followed them. Some boys broke and ran. After that it was save himself who could.

Gaffer Bucket half swung himself round—some of the laggards thought he meant pursuit and quickened the paces—and said, with energy, “Yees, I thowt so. Theers nou doubt on it, in my mind.”

He was face to face and eye to eye with Tom Spendlove. They were known to each other, and were very good friends. Bucket was the only man known at the “Blacksmith’s Arms” that could beat Tom Spendlove at draughts. Their respect was mutual, so they could afford to stand and stare at each other like sworn foes.

Gaffer Bucket was the first to break the silence with, “I would na deny that you hev a few good pints, but, dang it, perliteness is na one of ’um.”

“Good-morning, Mr. Bucket, hopin’ that this here sad noose wunna spile your ’ealth,” said Tom, with due humility of manner, but with a salty flavor of speech.

“Nou, nor yet my happetite, though some folks is fools as might very well be excused.”

“That’s ony th’ sober truth, Maaster Bucket, an’ more ’s the pity when they think themsen wise, when they’re ony owd and fu’ish.”

“A pert tongue is apt to outrun good sense, like a runaway hoss that’s thrown its rider. Howsomever, I binna here as a grindlestone for you to whet your wits on, Tom Spendlove. Not but how they wants to be grund, so help me! if aw I hear is true.”

“An’ what might ye have heeard, Maaster Bucket?”

“That you’re oaf enough to think that that theer is the work of a gen’l’man.”

“The chap as did it was no delver, that I’ll sweer.”

“A gen’l’man staying wi’ th’ Squire, too!”

"Demme, I dunno care wheer he's staying."

"Nou, of course you dount. You'll ram your head agen the wa' whether it's mad' o' brown paper or flintstun. Serve you d—— well right if it split your noddle for you, Thomas Spendlove."

"If he isna the party, aw right; I wunna say he is. Percase he is the party—munna I tell the truth, Maaster Bucket?"

"Dunna you go and cast your pearls afore swine. I reckon truth is a sort o' pearl, to be kept in your breeches-pocket, and not shied about like marbles, to the danger o' the compinny."

"Well, I hanna no grudge agen him, as why I? But if he did this here, I says—"

"I says it's no business o' yourn whether he did or not. If he did, he hed his raisons. What kind o' right hed you, Tom Spendlove, to be spying and prying around? He didna do it, I tell you."

"Well, if you says so, ony—"

"You wunna tak' a man's word for it, eh? You want proof, eh? Look here then—that gen'l'man is jest sweet on our Miss Margaret, our young missis, you know."

"What then?"

"What then! You binna such an oaf, Tom, be you? You'd go and split on the young missis's young man. You'd go and split on him as 'll be the squire o' th' place some o' these days? Thou must be gone daft, man."

"I dunna see why I shouldna tell the truth, squire or—"

"Happen you dunna. If you come up to the Hall with the pason, though, let me see you, and I'll give you another proof that it wanna him you saw. If I wanna your friend, Tom, I'd let you hev your own pig-headed way wi'out more ado."

Gaffer Bucket hurried home the shortest way, the only occasion perhaps in his whole life when he put on steam. Moreover, he felt in a hurry, an entirely novel sensation. He looked very much like a fat duck overdriven. On the way he pulled out his purse, a curious old leather bag, black and greasy, and counted the contents. Ten shillings and threepence three farthings.

"Dang it aw, it's no good. I'm hard up. What a moke I be to go and drop it aw in the bank. My wage isna doo—leastways the second month isna—for o'er a week. I mun hev it by hook or by crook."

When he got back breakfast was over, so he sought Silas and found him alone, smoking furiously.

"Please, marster, will you let me have five pounds? I want—"

"Eh, what's that, Bucket? Five pounds? What do you want five pounds for?"

"I should like to mak' a payment, sir."

"A payment, a payment; dear me! is that the vicar already? In a little while, in a little while, Bucket."

"No good if I dunno have it now, marster."

"God bless me, can't you see I'm busy, busy, man. Shut that door and go to the devil with you!" roared Silas.

Bucket went and asked Margaret. She had not the money; she was very busy, but she would run and ask her father. She was off before Bucket could pump up a word. She was soon back.

"He won't, Bucket. You should have told me you had been to him; I might have gone about it differently. Papa is a justice of the peace, you know, Bucket, and just now he feels it very strongly. He said something about sending for the constable, and committing you to prison for inciting him to a breach of the peace. Never anger a bull, Bucket, nor a magistrate."

Bucket was in despair.

"She little knows as how it's for her sake," he groaned inwardly, as he watched her retreating figure.

He caught sight of Mr. Digby Roy on the balcony.

"It ud be fun if he wud."

He hesitated, and decided in the negative.

He went to his own room, locked the door, and sat down with his head in his hands. In two minutes he was snoring. Asleep? Not a bit of it. Thinking, only thinking. Suddenly he thrust out both his hands, and clutched the air tightly. Dreaming? Not in the least. He was taking the bull by the horns. He got up and went straight to Cowp's room.

That gentleman was within, standing in front of the glass, with his hands in his pockets. He was looking in the glass, but not at himself, for he saw nothing, absolutely nothing. He was in a fog, he was in a corner, he was in a ditch, he told himself over and over again. He was equal to so much, and no more. If he could only have told Silas everything, without telling him anything, it would have been a great relief. For his secret to come out after

all, and in such a wretched public, flaring manner, was intolerable. It would disgrace him. It would be extremely disagreeable to the family. It looked almost like a plot against them, as though he doubted their right to the property. His image came to wear the lineaments of a spy, an accuser, a traitor. What would Margaret think?

Yes, he was unquestionably in a bog. And with what horrible ease he had got into it. He traced it all to his reticence with Mr. Digby Roy on the subject of his former visit to the place. Yet the reticence was quite natural under the peculiar circumstances. Why should he have taken the Englishman into his confidence on so delicate and personal a subject? It never once occurred to him to challenge the eccentricity of his father in choosing such a singular hiding-place. If he kept out of the way, he might avoid meeting that terrible wagoner, honest Tom Spendlove. No one would ever dream that the "foreign lookin' chap" was one of the visitors at the Hall. He had better get away as quickly as possible. But there was Margaret to be thought of. Just then a knock came at the door. He turned to the window, pulled out his cigar-case, and sang out, "Come in."

Gaffer Bucket entered, closing the door after him.

"Well, Bucket, what is it?"

"I reckon you've heeard the noose, sir?"

"The church-yard affair? Yes. Funny thing to happen. What about it?"

"I've been down to see about it. Tom Spendlove says as how he saw the man—the gen'l'man as did it, and would know him again."

"Indeed. But why 'the gentleman?' Was he a gentleman, then?"

"You won't think me imperdent, sir?"

"I am sure you would not be that, Bucket. What is it?"

"Well, you see, sir, I binna no friend o' Sparrer-hawk's," began Gaffer Bucket laboriously, not knowing how to set his ideas on their feet, nor which ideas to set. In consequence of which puzzlement, he was compelled to fall back in full force on his dialect, which he had learned to modify for ears polite.

"You don't like the sparrow-hawk, eh? I cannot say that I am much in love with him either, or the sparrow, for the matter of that."

"I dunna mean a bird, I mean—a man. I calls him, and I knows why, too, Sparrer-hawk, though his name's Mr. Roy."

"Oh, that's a different matter," said Cowp, coldly.

"Miss Margie dunna like him either."

Cowp's face grew hard as marble, and he fixed his eyes sternly on Bucket.

"Dang it, sir, I knowed I should mak' a mess on it. I mean this: for Miss Margie's sake I dunna want you to get in a mess, and I'm mighty feart you will, sir, if we dunna mind."

Cowp's face relaxed a little.

"What do you refer to? Explain yourself."

"Tom Spendlove says as how the gen'l'man as did it is staying at the Hall, meaning here, and his name he heeard was Cowp, meaning you, sir."

He would like to have added that it was Sparrer-hawk who had furnished Tom with this name, but he abstained for prudential reasons. The blood mounted over Cowp's face. He took in the situation in a moment, and his courage rose. He was brave enough when he could be true to himself and play the man. It was petty artifice and small deceit that took the courage out of him. He laughed.

"That fellow Spendlove is a pretty smart young man, I guess. Gives me another idea of the English peasantry from what I have held from my boyhood up. It's awkward, very, but there's no help for it that I can see. If he says I did it, I suppose I did. That's all there is to it."

This was too much for Gaffer Bucket. He rubbed his head slowly, and looked attentively at the carpet.

"You dunna mean you'll own up to it, sir?" he said, in a half tone.

"I cannot very well do otherwise."

"My God, sir! but you munna, you munna. It ud be the talk of the parish for many a long year. Think o' Miss Margie—the marster—the honor of the famly—robbin' graves—vilating the dead! My stars, Mr. Cowp, be guided by me! Ye didna do it. I tould him so. I haaf proven it to him. And I'll proven it to him whole and entire, if ye be guided by me, sir. Do please, for—Miss—Margie's—sake!"

Cowp's eyes flashed.

"Look here, Bucket, you're a good old man, and I like you.

It's like this: if they charge me with this, I shall admit it. I had my reasons for doing what I did, and they were good ones. At the same time, it's a nasty bit of business. I wouldn't that it should have happened for a great deal. Is there any way—"

"That's it, sir, that's jest it. Praise the Lord, ye've got the right pig by the tail this time. Will you trust me wi' a five-pun note, sir?"

"Half a dozen, man, half a dozen."

"Happen you'll never put eyes on it again?"

"Let it travel, Bucket, to the ends of the earth."

"I wudna have troubled you, sir, but like a foo' I puts aw mine i' th' bank. I axed marster, I axed Miss Margie, she axed marster, too, but bein' a kind of a magistret he isna himself just now."

Cowp cut him short with four five-pound notes.

"I ask no questions. Take them. Let me never see them again."

Bucket took them.

"Too much, too much an' he isna first cousin to a knave. Now I'll sweer that Tom Spendlove hasna put eyen on you afore," he said, slyly, as he turned and left the room.

Cowp remained in his room, in an unenviable state of mind; wishing one while to go and brave it out, and then praying to his stars that Bucket might not prove a rotten reed. It seemed an interminable length of time before a maid appeared, and said that the master would be much obliged if he would come down into the library for a few minutes, as soon as possible. Cowp sent word that he would come at once. His sensations were peculiar. He felt cold, sick, flat, and empty. He had no sense of strength, of courage, of manhood. He was like a dried-up pea-pod. Shaken, he would rattle he was sure. A mere simulachre, a phantom of a man. He was surprised to discover that the mirror reflected no trace of this examination. Instead of cadaverousness, there was a deep, rich, subcutaneous glow of health. "I look like a gladiator, and feel like a mummy," he informed himself, as he went down-stairs. It was odd, but as he entered the library the springs of inner strength which had run altogether dry sprang suddenly up within him, and began to play their waters vigorously.

The vicar and his wardens were grouped near the fireplace; behind them stood Tom Spendlove, and near to him Gaffer Bucket, while Mr. Digby Roy sat on a cushioned seat in a window em-

brasure, and surveyed the scene through his eyeglass. Silas sat at his writing-table, with flushed face and clouded brow. As Cowp came in he pointed to a seat beside him.

"Mr. Cowp, we are investigating this church-yard affair, and I find that there is an idiotic idea abroad that the lunatic who spent his night among the tombs resembled you."

Cowp laughed, and said, "That's funny. Do you—"

"Tom Spendlove, stand forward!" cried Silas.

Tom stood forward.

"Now look at this gentleman and tell us, is he the one you saw prowling about there yesterday?"

Mr. Digby Roy leaned forward as Tom took a long, steady look at Cowp.

"No, Squire, it wanna him. No more him than it war—him," pointing to Mr. Digby Roy.

A roar of laughter loud and long filled the room. It was the letting off of nervous steam, and was a great relief to everybody.

"Dang it, thou shalt have another five-pun note for that, Tom," whispered Gaffer Bucket.

As for Mr. Digby Roy he looked extremely grave. The comedy lacked salt, he thought.

CHAPTER XLV.

OF GHOSTS FROM THE TOMBS.

THE garden-party at Abbot's Hey was in full swing, and our Lady of Fancy was in her glory. She fitted the occasion admirably, being, as every hostess should be, one of the chief adornments of the house.

"You look like a duchess, and if you were not my wife I would fall in love with you," quoth Silas, who made a first-rate appearance himself.

The gathering was large and brilliant, the whole country-side having been swept of its fine flowers to form this social nosegay. Much of this was due to Francisca, who was careful to let it be known that she was going to shed the light of her lovely counte-

nance on the scene. Where the Countess of Eden led there could be no danger in following. Abbot's Hey was a capital place for such an *al fresco* meeting. The building itself was quaint to look upon, mediæval in its suggestions, and romantically situated. Entirely secluded from the neighboring world, it nevertheless presented at every turn a series of superb landscape views: the eyes were fed all round with beauty, a rare preventive against ennui. There were terraces with belvederes; shrubberies with winding walks, artificial caverns, sparkling streams; curious flower-gardens, wherein antiquity showed charming and smelled sweet; velvety lawns, a tennis-court, a bowling-green, croquet plots, and archery grounds. Somewhere out of sight was a band that filled the air with soft, delicious strains. Flags were flying from towers and tents, of which latter there were many; small and of gay colors, they peeped out everywhere, like strange floral growths. There were seats for two in each tent, a distinctly happy thought. And for the same Mr. Digby Roy was to be thanked.

Silas was doing splendidly. The horrible sensation of having lost his backbone did not once occur to him. On the contrary, he was distinctly conscious of possessing a vertebral column, firm but not stiff, supporting his body with graceful ease and genial dignity. He was pleased with himself, and a bit proud, like one who had learned the art of balancing himself on skates. He grew brave, and struck out on his own account like a man; he waxed bold, even to the attempting of fancy movements. Still, he was on ice, and he knew it. Beauty's best touch is happiness, which is by the same token her rarest. The ladies voted Silas a "decidedly handsome man."

He did not know how much he owed to Francisca, though he might have known from the frequency with which he sought her company for a few minutes at a time. She responded graciously, cutting herself instantly loose from the group of which she was always the centre, and devoting herself entirely to a brief promenade with the master of Abbot's Hey. He passed from her to the other women with admirable urbanity and self-possession; they found him delightful. Indeed, it was a mutual discovery. Francisca observed him closely, and made a rather singular discovery—to wit, that while he played the country-gentleman with the other women, and played it, she thought, excellently well, with her he fell back more naturally upon himself, the yeoman with

gentle blood in his veins, rather than the squire of old inheritance. It amused her at first, then it pleased her, finally it touched her on the side of her sympathy. There was a subtle and elusive element of pathos in it, she thought, or, rather, she felt. Her power of divination was exquisite; and her experience had taught her that the situations discovered and discoverable only by divination were the richest and most vital pieces of her life. By them she tarried, as one halts at an oasis, knowing that the desert lies beyond.

She did not approve of his manner of addressing her; there was too much of "your ladyship" in it. She tried to correct him, delicately.

"I do not like my friends to be—suppose I say—formal with me."

"That only shows your pretty sense. I like your name, Francisca, better even than Countess. It slides off so nicely into Fanny. Sweet name Fanny, don't you think? Brings back early memories, before I met Priscilla, you know."

"Poor Fanny!" she murmured, with a soft sigh and an arch look.

"No," he exclaimed; "I'm sure I didn't."

"Didn't what?" laughing.

"Jilt her, of course."

He mopped his forehead vigorously, as they stood in the shadow of a laurel. He had been talking with the Hon. Mrs. Beltifrew, of Steeplechurch Towers, a sardonic old lady, who did not believe in new people in the least and carried her lack of faith on the tip of her tongue. She had robbed him of his backbone for the nonce, completely.

"No," he said, "it isn't the heat that knocks a man like me over. It's the life, Fran—Countess, the life."

"You have taken too strong a dose of Beltifrew, that is all. You should be more careful, you know, with strong waters."

"You make me forget the truth. She—and others—jog my memory. She stands for the whole thing."

"One would think you were not happy in your new life."

"Happy! Would an honest gander be happy if he had to be done up as a peacock and strut about accordingly? No, I'm not in it, that's the beginning and the end of it."

"You do not know yourself, Mr. Oldcastle. You are in it with

the best of them, if you will only believe it. Till you took that overdose of Beltifrew I was proud of you."

"You mean it? Honor bright?"

"Honor bright."

"Then Beltifrew may go hang. I'll tell you now how I manage it. It's a secret. You won't tell?"

"Never, if it is a nice secret; never, never, never."

"Every morning at sunrise—it was Becky's idea, you know—wonderful head, Becky's—Nature gave her my share of wit, besides her own, to take care of; thought her the safer bank, I reckon. Well, every morning I do a couple of hour's ploughing, all on the sly, you understand?"

"Ploughing! What do you plough?"

"Why, the land of course. Glorious plan; makes me feel like an honest man—a gentleman, almost—the rest of the day."

"Unless you happen to get an overdose of—"

She laughed like a beautiful witch, he thought.

"That's true. The next time I know I am going to come across her I'll see what an extra—"

"Brother Silas, have you seen my niece Margaret lately? I cannot find her."

She was dressed in mauve, and carried a sunshade of the same color. She looked supremely well, and she knew it. Tall, plump, stately, her figure kept brave harmony with her nobility of countenance. There was something sweetly fine and generous in her make-up. Quite a sister to be proud of, being a sufficient credential for any man she acknowledged brother that the quality of his blood was not strained. She could drive wild horses with a silken thread, said thread being as vital as a nerve, quivering with the subtle impulse of life. Mr. Digby Roy and the Countess of Eden and the Duke of Cape Cod had, without knowing it, been answering to the pressure of silken threads for a good hundred minutes. In and out, up and down, here and there, to and fro they moved, obedient to the laws of butterfly movement as it seemed, only—they never chanced to meet. It was a pretty game, and not stupid, and suggested to Rebecca some vivid images of Life and Destiny. The way she picked up Cowp and brought him with her unobserved to the very side of the Countess, was just like one of the small curves of destiny, brief and abrupt, but firm, clean, and beautiful, and pregnant with God knows what!

Rebecca caught the glance of the Countess as she turned her head partly round, and held her eyes long enough for Cowp to recognize her and exclaim, "Is it possible—Lady Eden!"

Their eyes met, and Francisca's face flashed radiant.

"Why, Mr. Cowp, wonders never cease." As he bent over her hand, she added, "I thought you were not to sail for a month yet, and here you are in Peakshire, looking as natural as a native-born Englishman."

"Which, having had an Englishman for my father, I take as a compliment, Countess."

"I am delighted. I must write to Eden and let him know. He has been looking forward to your coming."

"It's enough almost to make a man wish himself an American," murmured Silas, comically.

"Nay, nay, we would not import all our fine fruits, Mr. Oldcastle," she said, giving him a smile that seemed like a new and better kind of light than that of the sun.

She continued: "My husband calls Mr. Cowp his best American friend, and—"

"The Countess?" queried Silas.

"Goes with him—in that."

"Then come along, Becky, and let them have a palaver together. Lucky dog!"

He made a feint of poking Cowp in the ribs as he moved away.

"Now tell me, please, what is the meaning of this? How came you here, sir? Why are you not with us? Do you think it quite fair? Why don't you explain yourself?"

He laughed.

"You give me no chance. I would not interrupt you, though, for the world. I like to hear your voice."

"I am dumb, sir."

"A silent instrument of music. My being here is entirely due to a—a friend of mine, a Mr. Digby Roy, who insisted on bringing me down with him."

"You are staying here, with the family?"

"Yes. He is a friend of theirs. They are just awfully kind people, I think."

"Of that I am sure. Of course you know they are newcomers?"

"I understand so. Have they always been—well, what shall I say? County people—isn't that the phrase?"

"The phrase is correct, but—need you ask?"

"No, come to think of it, I need not. Still, they are not common people."

"Oh dear, no. The ladies are—or ought to be—gentlewomen, though I think Mrs. Oldcastle is—not so much to my taste as her sister-in-law and her daughter. Do you not think Mr. Oldcastle a handsome man?"

"Decidedly. I like him very much."

"So do I. A genuine heart of oak. The men like him, too. The ladies—I vote for Squire Oldcastle. What he lacks is—not the prime qualities of a man, at any rate. What think you of the young lady?"

"I couldn't very well tell you, Countess."

She looked straight in his eyes, whither his secret seemed to betake itself. She laughed, soft and liquid as running water, with half-notes suggestive of the far-away mellow chime of a bell.

"A lovely creature, and good as she is sweet, I am sure, is Margaret Oldcastle. A serious choice?"

"It takes two to make a bargain—alas!"

"Oh, say not so! And why 'Alas?' Surely—can I be of any service to you? I will—"

"I have hopes, great hopes; indeed, I do not know why I should say 'Alas.' And yet, between the cup and the lip there—"

"Need be no slip. She is coming, you see. Her aunt, look at her—a glorious piece of womanhood. She makes me feel proud of my sex," said Francisca, advancing. It was like swan meeting swan.

Rebecca was happy. She was managing things so neatly. She was convinced now that Mr. Cowp was no idle adventurer. She was free to like him; more, to say so. Listening to her aunt's expression of her sentiments, Margaret smiled and kept silent. Of what use was anything now? She thought of the future, and shuddered.

"Was it not too bad, Lady Eden, for Mr. Cowp to keep his knowledge of you a secret locked up in his head?" inquired Rebecca, glancing reproachfully at that gentleman.

"Why head? Why not heart?" he answered.

"Because you deserve it, sir. Do not answer him, Miss Oldcastle. Though I forgive him forgetting me. It was hardly to be wondered at."

The pretty, wicked glance she threw at Margaret made her meaning luminous.

"I never dreamed that you were within a hundred miles of here. That I did not forget you, that I was even audacious enough to mention your name, to add that I was going to pay you and the Earl a visit, I can prove to you by the testimony of an unimpeachable witness," urged Cowp with gallant gravity.

"A creature whom you have suborned."

"If you mean Mr. Digby—" began Rebecca, who was already mentally intoning "Check," with a smile flitting about her mouth, subduldly.

"Ha!" interrupted Cowp, following her eyes, "here he comes, the man to whom I owe this happy meeting. He will bear me out, I say."

Francisca turned her glance, and at the same moment Rebecca moved her position by a step, and cut it off.

"Allow me, please—that lovely brooch must not be lost," she murmured, while her fingers played deftly about Francisca's throat-gear for a few seconds.

"Lady Eden, permit me to introduce—"

Rebecca drew back. Their eyes met, and like electric sparks flashed out the simultaneous exclamations, "Phil—!"

"You!"

Every vestige of color fled her face, but she had self-possession enough to drop her gloves. The picking of them up gave Mr. Digby Roy sufficient time to recollect that he had spoken to Cowp of their former acquaintance, to berate his folly in so doing, and to determine his present line of conduct.

"I am delighted, Lady Eden, beyond measure . . . after so many years . . . such changes . . . and you recognized me. . . . I thought that you would have forgotten, quite forgotten, features and . . . yes . . . even the name of . . . Digby Roy."

"I do not remember—names, so well as faces. Still, I was surprised. I did not expect the—the pleasure of meeting you to-day."

She turned to Rebecca, and said in her sweetest manner, "My

nerves, perhaps, are not as strong as they were, still these unexpected meetings with old acquaintances are—are like—”

“Ghosts from the tomb. You are right, dear Countess, they are,” responded Rebecca with a dryness which Francisca did not seem to notice, though Mr. Digby Roy did.

CHAPTER XLVI.

OF THE MONK'S DELL.

THE guests were all gone. Rebecca and Margaret sat together on a terrace, with the sun shooting his crimson arrows at them on a level.

“There goes the first bell,” said Margaret, rising.

“I am not a poetess,” observed Rebecca, keeping her seat, “but I have an ear for sound, and—”

“That is what ears are made for, I have always thought, dear.”

“I know what rhymes, and what does not. She cried, ‘Phil.’ Now ‘Phil’ does not rhyme with ‘Dig.’ She never knew him as Digby Roy, I am sure. She knew him as Philip Something.”

“Now, aunt, you are concocting a romance. Manufacturing it before my eyes, and trying to palm it off as genuine.”

“I am concocting no romance, child. I am scenting a mystery.”

The girl lifted her nose in the air, and sniffed the four points of the compass.

“It hasn’t got to me yet. Where does it lie?”

“I would give something to know what the Countess knows of him.”

“Oh! I thought she was one of your stand-bys, swear-bys, fight-bys, live-and-die-bys. But we really must go in, dear, or we shall be late for dinner.”

As they moved houseward, Rebecca said, “You mistake me. I do not suggest wrong-doing on her part.”

“You think it would be difficult for her to do wrong, eh?”

“She is one of those women who change the quality of an action by coming in contact with it. She could do without reproach what in another woman would be distinctly wrong. Did

you notice her sudden pallor? When Lady Eden grows pale at the sight of a man, you may be pretty sure of this, Margaret—she knows something about him which—which I also would like to know.”

As they entered the house, Margaret bent towards her aunt and said in a low voice, “Don’t say anything more, please, dear. I have promised to—marry him!”

“What!” exclaimed Rebecca, and stopped short. But Margaret picked up her skirts and ran up-stairs. Rebecca stood as if rooted to the spot.

“This must not be, shall not be. The girl is mad, or her mother, or both. I will see the Countess. I will see the Countess.”

Then she went slowly to her apartments. If she could have seen the Countess just then, she might have doubted of her ability to render the particular service desired.

Francisca was alone in her boudoir. She did not feel alone; his presence pervaded the room. Her color was heightened, and her eyes were unusually bright. She felt almost afraid to think, lest he should hear her. Her brain was overheated. Again he had met her full tilt in the open way, and asserted his supremacy. Time had loosened the links of memory, and the chain that had fretted and galled her so cruelly had wellnigh fallen away. His sudden reappearance had bound her once more, hand and foot. The intervening space was blotted out as by magic, and the dreadful past seemed as but yesterday. Now as then, he was master and she was slave; he had but to command, and she knew that she had to obey sooner or later. There was worse yet, wickeder yet. Under the iron glove was a hand—a living hand—a warm, strong, lover’s hand. It was no use denying it. It was there, and she felt it, and the touch thrilled her through and through. She buried her face in her hands, even as she folded tight the wings of her soul, seeking to hide from herself her terror, her horror, her shame, fearful, delicious, biting like an acid, intoxicating as Phrygian strains.

He had said, with full mastery in his tones, “I must see you alone—soon—to-night. You know the dell, Monk’s Dell I think they call it. I will be there at nine.”

She answered neither nay nor yea; he did not seem to expect it. She thought she would not go; she said she would not, again and again. Nevertheless she knew she would go. She went.

Monk's Dell was a spot of lonely beauty, between a dark fir wood and steep hanging pastures. A wild array of tumbled rocks, patches of long grass, ferns innumerable, mosses, a limpid brook with stepping-stones, and a huge black rock with a dim resemblance to the figure of a seated monk jutting from its front, the head and cowl in some lights hitting the fancy hard. A human trail of immemorial antiquity traversed the dell, while another wound in and out among the rocks, and along the tops, leading to the pastures. The moon was not above the tree-tops, but her light was in the sky, mingling with the duskier twilight, and lending to the scene something of the gladness of the day, and something of the pensive melancholy of the night.

Francisca stood leaning against the monk's knees. Her heart gave a quick leap as his figure stood outlined against the sky, in the path along the tops. He came down with his old swing, and forward with his old eagerness.

"First are you, Francisca. Are you early, or is my watch slow?"

"I think I am a little early," she answered, trying to freeze with an icy tone the warm, familiar life in his "Francisca."

"It was so, I remember, in the old days, and I thought it very pretty of you then, and—now."

"I wished to get back as early as possible."

"It seems odd after all these years; more like a dream. You are not altered, or only for the better. Sweeter, riper, more—"

"You are changed much. You have even outgrown your name, it seems."

"A bagatelle. I did not wish my name to proclaim my identity. I have mellowed, that is all. Something surely unites us, Francisca. Is it destiny?"

"I hoped we should never meet again. You promised to leave England for good. Why haven't you kept your word?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know, unless it was that I began to feel like an exile. Then, of course, I began to pine for England, like a baby for its mother's breast. Sometimes I thought of you. Funny, wasn't it? but I swear that four thousand miles away I have sniffed the odor of—your hair!"

"Oh, Philip, don't, don't! You have not come back to— You will leave me in peace, Philip?"

"How is that one-sided baby getting on, that was all mother and no father?"

"My Muriel? She has grown an angel, in wisdom, in beauty, in stature. Her spirit name is Theodora. Heaven gave her to me."

"Poor father! And my lord, the Earl, are his eyes still holden, and his heart still gross?"

"Some day, for her sake, he will, I think, I pray, I believe, care for me a bit."

Her head was bent, and her voice trembled.

"Ha, you women, what fools you are! If he would only love you for one single day I dare say you would be willing to die the day after?"

"God knows I would!"

"I thought so. Well, it's very fine, I suppose, but, to tell honest truth, I don't admire it. By-the-bye, how is my respected father-in-law? Do you know anything of him? Is he dead?"

"No; he is living."

"Mad?"

"No. Sad, broken-hearted."

"In the workhouse?"

"Do you think me so callous, so heartless, as that? I connived at his ruin—you forced me to that—but that only made my duty to him the stronger. He has not wanted for anything, I can assure you. I mean, anything that mere money can secure. Oh, Philip, Philip, if you could only see that old man bowed with shame and bitter sorrow, moaning for the light that would reveal his lost—his stolen—honor, and show it whole once more to the world before he dies, you would know something of the remorse that has gnawed my heart all these years. I think you would be brave and make atonement. It is not too late, though it soon may be."

"Why don't you make an atonement and set the example?"

"You stand alone. You alone would suffer. I have to think of my child, my husband's name. More, Philip, I had to think of you. Go away, out of the country, and give me leave to tell the truth, and you shall see whether or not I make an atonement. You shall see for whose sake I have been dumb."

"I can quite believe it. You are a good woman and a brave woman, also you are a foolish woman. I shall do nothing of the

kind. The less said now of the past the better all round. Where does he live?"

"I cannot tell you."

"Do you mean you do not know?"

"Yes, I know. I think you do also."

"On my honor I do not."

"Then I cannot tell you. I do not think you have any right to know."

"As you like. It is a matter of no importance. I don't know where the stones are by this time, but the settings I have still by me. I have had them refilled with false brilliants. They look tip-top. Indeed, I am thinking of making a present of them to a certain young lady, a particular friend of mine. I don't think she will ever find it out. You don't object, I hope?"

"I think it would be wiser of you to break up the settings, once for all. They are such as would be recognized at once. If they were traced to you—"

"I'll risk it, since I cannot afford to buy a genuine set. You do not ask me who the lady is."

"Since she is not your wife I have no interest in her."

"Just the opposite to me. I have more interest in her now, I fancy, than I shall have when she is my wife."

"I do not understand you."

"Is the Earl down here with you?"

"No. He is abroad."

"I did not dream that Wigwell was near here. Never thought about it. How long are you going to stay?"

"I don't know—probably a short time only—now."

"I understand. Have you seen much of the Oldcastles?"

"Very little indeed. You know them, it seems?"

"Yes. They are what they are, though what Madame Oldcastle really is the Lord knows; I don't. It was wretchedly awkward, our meeting like that. I would rather they should have thought us strangers to each other. It is too late now; but I want you to clearly understand, Francisca, they have no interest in my past life, none whatever. And I shall expect you to offer them no enlightenment."

"Was it to tell me this that you wished to see me?"

"Yes. And I will give you my reason: I am going to marry Margaret Oldcastle."

The words went through her like a shot.

"You forget—your wife, Philip?"

He misunderstood her.

"Nay, I don't forget her, poor girl. You seem to have forgotten her. You have never once asked me whether she was dead or alive. I learned to love my wife, Francisca, with a better love than I ever gave you. If she had lived, and would have forgiven me—well, who knows what might have happened? That is a dream, however. She died. It is no crime to marry a second time that I know of."

Francisca trembled from head to foot. Which was she to be—true to Janet and false to Philip, or true to Philip and false to Janet? Her brain was as a whirling tempest until of a sudden the thought of Margaret came like a lightning flash, and she saw where lay the bog and where the hard rock.

"Philip, you say you loved her. I did not know it."

"How should you? It was over yonder, in the New World, that the new life sprang."

"She knew it?"

"She knew it."

"She returned it?"

"Like the sweetest woman she was—at first."

"Why 'at first?'"

"Because—since her death—thinking over things—I think I was a bit blind at the time—I remember—I am sure I was—little memories crop up—words—half sentences—looks—ah, my God, I believe she found out the truth! Perhaps it was better, after all, she died. If it hadn't killed her, it would have killed her love. I don't like to think about it, but—it bites me like an adder—the fancy that it did, in fact, kill both her love and herself. There, there, let it lie. It's over and done with. Only, this is true, Francisca, she carried my heart with her when she went away. I can still offer my hand to a lady, my foot to a rogue, and the secret of my defective anatomy I keep to myself—that is to say, I share it with you, the one woman to whom the state of my anatomy is a matter of absolute indifference."

He spoke laughingly, mockingly at last, to carry off the traces of an emotion that testified, had he known it, to something in him that was valuable. Francisca heard the half-suppressed testimony, and her heart swelled within her.

"Philip"—she laid her hand lightly on his arm—"suppose your wife were not dead?"

Perhaps it was her tone that made him give her such a steady, inquiring look.

"Well, what then?"

"It would alter your conduct."

He laughed, bitterly.

"If she were living of course she would be with me. Where we should have been goodness knows; but one thing is certain, I should not have been here now with you, talking nonsense."

"Not altogether nonsense. Janet is alive, Philip!"

He laughed aloud.

"The deuce she is, poor girl!" He touched his pocket. "I have here the announcement of her death years ago."

"You were deceived."

"I have seen her grave."

"The grave of a poor outcast woman who was buried in the name of your wife. You see, I know the whole story."

Her manner struck him. He came close to her and gazed hard at her.

"Are you mad? What damnable trick is this?"

"It is no trick, Philip, nor am I mad. Janet Reed, your wife, is living, here in England, with her father."

"Janet alive! O God, what does it mean? Where am I?" he cried aloud, staggering, and catching the rock with his hands.

When he spoke again, he said, "Where is she? I must see her."

"I think not—at least, not yet."

"I must see her, I tell you. My Janet!"

"I dare not let you. I will see her myself first. She must, she will consent, I am sure. But at present—"

"Ah! I see, I see."

He drew in his breath sharply, and involuntarily his hands clinched.

"Can you wonder at it, Philip? Think what her father has suffered. Much as she loved him, she left him, and stood by you like a true wife when she believed you innocent. When she came to find out that—the truth—then she—I wonder it didn't kill her. If it killed her love for you, is it—"

"Enough. I am no stone. I see it all. To me she is dead.

Would to God she had died in ignorance! She has cast me overboard."

"She is still your wife, though."

"I am not her husband, though. You don't know her. I do. Forgive me! Yes, when frogs fly."

"Try her."

"She is her father's daughter now."

"Then go to her as you ought to—through her father. Oh, Philip, do! Throw yourself on his mercy. I know him; his heart is sound. He will not make it hard for you. For her sake he will—"

"There was once a time when if he had treated me frankly and honorably, given me a bit of advice in the right spirit, a grain of sympathy, an ounce of help, I should have buckled to and have done my best. He gave me only distrust, suspicion, contempt, and bitter words. He did his best to kill Janet's affection for me. He had social prejudices. He was jealous of her love for me. He ruined my soul. I have ruined his character. Quits, I say. He knows why she deserted me, I suppose?"

"No, no, not a word. She laid it to other reasons."

"See how it stands! His original opinion of me is justified, he thinks. I have topped my offence by turning out a brute of a husband. Gad, it was rough kindness on her part! It would have been more merciful to have told him the truth, and have spared me the deeper damnation."

"She did not see it in that light, I am sure."

"Perhaps not. But abase myself to that old pig-headed Pharisee—cruel bigot—moral slanderer—sentimental prude—hateful compound of Tory servility and Radical insolence—the man who drove the devil into me—no, Francisca, never! His righteousness has been my destruction. Before I will exalt it I will see him d——d."

"Then you will go away and leave them in peace."

"They are not in the neighborhood, are they?"

"Yes, they are."

"Where?"

"They live just outside Abbot's Hey park."

"Not in that cottage near the Threep road?"

"Yes."

"By George, it almost takes my breath away! What a thing

is Chance! How blind we mortals are! I might have met her a dozen times. I have been on the point of calling there once or twice."

"She has seen you once."

"What's that? Janet has seen me? How do you know?"

His interest in Janet was by no means dead yet, judging from the eagerness of his manner. Francisca related the circumstance.

"She doesn't guess I am staying at the Hall?"

"No, but she might learn any day."

He frowned, and fell a-thinking.

"Afraid of me—hates me," dropped from him several times.

"I thought I heard a step," murmured the Countess.

He raised his head and stood listening, Francisca watching his face in the moonlight.

CHAPTER XLVII.

OF MOTHERHOOD.

"THERE is no one; though perhaps we have been here long enough. Janet is dead as far as I am concerned, there is no doubt of that. The next question is, Am I to throw away my chance in life because of a legal fiction? I am morally free to marry again. I shall do so," he said, with a quiet, determined air.

"Philip, you dare not, you shall not do such a wicked thing!" exclaimed Francisca.

"Who is to hinder me?"

"I will; for your own sake if nothing else, I will!"

"You will not. What you will do is this: you will order your trunks to be packed to-night, and to-morrow you will put two hundred miles between you and Abbot's Hey. In a word, you will mind your own business and let sleeping dogs lie. Familiar spokes, perhaps, and such as the ancient of the parish use, but for you, Francisca, they are full of safe wisdom."

He spoke with the suave assurance of masterdom. It sounded like a bald statement of events that would come to pass; only

here and there an accent or a stress of the voice hinted of authority and command.

"I might be your slave, your dog," Francisca flamed out.

He gazed curiously at her for a while before he said, "Every woman should own a lord and master. I am yours, that is all."

"You expect me to stand by and see you do a foul wrong to an innocent girl? You made me your accomplice once, but—"

"You mistake me. You are not to stand by. You are to go away, travel, vanish. Further, the Reeds are your pensioners. I know what that means; they adore you. Your wish is law. You will invent an impending earthquake or a coming plague that will necessitate their leaving the neighborhood at once—with you, in fact. Get them out of England. Keep them out."

Calm, self-possessed, semi-ironical, deferential, and, to appearance, most gallant was he. Francisca saw the gulf before her and shivered. A strange picture truly. No common woman was she, suffering the common penalty that waits more often than we think for, in one form or another, upon a common offence. One of the queens of Fashion was she, one of the few remaining princesses of Politics. A brilliant luminary in Society. The friend and adviser of statesmen. Conquering most men, corrupting none. Imperious, high-spirited, clever, bewitching. A woman with a soul. In the world she was all of this. In Monk's Dell she was— She had a hard fight to fight just now, and she fought it, with all the wit and cunning, with all the strength and passion, of her womanhood. And she was beaten.

His last words were: "There, there; you have talked nonsense long enough. I vow if I were asking for a revival of our old relations, you could not have been more melodramatic and more enchanting. What I say is this: betray me, and I betray you. Which I should be sorry to do, if only on account of that miraculous little girl of yours, who is all mother and no father. Shall I see you home?"

"No, no," she answered, shrinking back.

"Then adieu, Francisca, adieu," he said, in his old tone, and left her, going down the dell.

She was alone, with her thronging, surging thoughts. Her heart frozen, her brain on fire. Her thoughts sprang half unconsciously into speech.

"Oh, this is terrible . . . terrible . . . why does he . . . what

have I done that he should . . . so changed . . . so changed . . . not a bit like the man he was when I . . . in body, but not in soul . . . no, no . . . tender, chivalrous, unselfish, noble-hearted . . . do men ever change their characters? . . . is it only that we . . . no, he was . . .”

Pacing to and fro, she suddenly stopped.

“Am I responsible for his fall? Am I? . . . He sinned for me . . . that is true . . . my sin . . . my sin . . .”

She lifted her hands skyward.

“O ye Heavens, that prefer truth above every virtue, ye know that his love saved me, kept me from utter despair, from seeking death!”

She hid her face in her hands, and sobbed.

“For him, for him, O my God! it was the beginning of evil! . . . It is just that I should suffer . . . O Muriel, Muriel, but for thee, dishonor, death, anything rather than share in another deed of guilt . . . no, no, no, for thy sake I dare not . . . my mother’s love works a strange cowardice in me . . . thy sweet cheek blush for a mother’s shame? Sooner, sooner would I see not one but a million hearts broken, lives wrecked, bright hopes quenched in despair, like torches dropped into the flood! . . . this is madness . . . then I am mad . . . devilish . . . then am I a devil, thank God!”

A low, wild laugh broke from her. She reeled, and clutched the rock for support, panting hard. Near the top of the winding path leading to the pastures, from behind a rock, sprang a female figure. A few quick bounds, and it stood near the half-bent form of the Countess.

“Are you ill, Lady Eden?”

Francisca raised herself quickly to her full height.

“You here—Janet—Tuer?”

Her voice was cold as ice, hard as steel.

“Lady Eden, who was that man that was with you?”

It sounded like a challenge.

“Ah, then you played the eavesdropper, the spy, did you?”

“You do not believe that of me—really?”

“Then what brings you here, pray?”

“I heard not a word that was spoken. I was too far away at first, and afterwards I stopped my ears. Lady, I love you too much for that. I did watch you—both—especially him. Can you wonder?”

"You followed him here?"

"Follow him! Nay, I should rather fly from him. I had been to see you. They told me you were not in. I was afraid to wait longer. This is a lonely way, but it is shorter, and therefore I chose it. When I came to the top yonder, I saw you, I saw him. Can you wonder that I stood, horror-struck, and watched?"

"You wished to see me?"

"Since you left this afternoon I have been talking to father about your plan of taking us abroad. For a long time it was, 'No, no, leave me alone, child. Here nobody sees me. Abroad they would point at me, and say, "There he is! old David Reed that stole Lady Eden's jewels."' He thinks all the world knows of his dishonor. He gave in at last, however. And I wanted to let you know that we are ready to go at any time."

"Poor man! Yet he has the supreme anodyne—a clear conscience. Rich man, rich man is your father. We will start tomorrow, I think."

"Yes, dear lady, yes. I was right. It was he, was it not?"

"Yes, it was your husband, Philip Tuer."

"Ah, I see it all. He found out that you— Oh, tell me, please, does he know that I am alive?"

"Yes, and he knows that you are somewhere in the neighborhood. The sooner we get away the better."

"Why did he trouble you, though?"

"Am I not of some little service to you?"

"Ah, yes, our blessed protector. And he has evidently discovered it. Did you meet him by accident?"

"No, by appointment. I thought it wiser. You are known to the servants, and he might have picked up something."

"Oh, how can I thank you, how can I speak my gratitude? To come here, alone, for our sakes!"

"Not altogether for your sake. The man who stole my jewels, being the son of his father, and your husband, could not be without some interest for me. I wanted to see him."

"You cannot deceive me, dear lady. You have my deepest gratitude."

Francisca made no reply. A cold shiver went through her.

"Is he staying about here, do you know?" Janet asked.

"Yes, I believe he is. I must leave you now. It is getting late."

Janet begged hard to see her home safely, but Francisca said, "No, thank you. I am not nervous. You shall hear from me in the morning, and we will leave to-morrow evening. Good-night."

CHAPTER XLVIII.

OF WIFEHOOD.

OLAF, King of Norway, the while his galley pitched, tossed, rolled, and shook with the shock of the waves, could run round her on the oar-blades of the rowers. Also, questionless, he could slip and go down between the green waves—the really interesting part of the performance to the on-lookers, though slurred in the chronicle. It is a hard thing to be perfect either in wisdom or folly, and the most veteran of sinners will on occasion relapse into righteousness. This is awkward, both in life and literature; for when you have got your gentleman well in hand, bowling merrily along towards the steep place down which it is customary to run violently into the sea and be drowned, it spoils the sport if he doubles and turns like a hunted hare, and runs to virtue of a sudden as a fox to earth. The doctrine that there is no place of repentance comes up very naturally, perhaps, as a protest against such conduct. Chagrin, however, is not Art; and though repentance may be a form of weakness, unwillingness to recognize and inability to handle the facts of character and life are not the credentials of genius.

That vulpine gentleman, Mr. Digby Roy, made a rather singular rush for righteousness. He meant well; and if the effort had succeeded, moral results of an interesting nature might have ensued. Personally, I should not have advised the step, but I was not consulted by him, and I am sorry it did not succeed. Nor do I hesitate to apologize for his singular behavior; for nothing perhaps calls for an apology so loudly as our best actions.

Mr. Digby Roy slept two hours, then he got into his slippers and dressing-gown and lighted his pipe. In his sleep he had been running to visions of fair women, at first. Broken images of Francisca, of Janet, of Margaret, of Rebecca: they grew into

giantesses, they turned into Amazons; they fought him, they fought each other over him. They were like fierce, monstrous birds, with talons that made him shudder. Somehow they got him over the cliff, and he fell fifty feet, till he caught in a wild apple-tree growing out of the rock, and hung there with a black abyss below him. The rock on a line with his eyes was carved into the cowed head of a monk. Altogether a pretty dream; one of those that show what a charming thing life would be at a slightly different angle. Distort the lines a bit, ever such a bit, and there leaps into life an element of the awful whose constant nearness is as great a mystery as it might well be a terror.

Mr. Digby Roy smoked on and on, until the room was full of smoke, and the light of the lamp was dimmed. In accordance with the dogma of the modern ascetics, did we not know that it is the privilege of small philosophers and big fools to bite the thumb at truth, his intellect should have become clouded, his wits befogged, and his sentiments of the baser sort. On the contrary, however, his intellect seemed purged, his mind became calm and clear, while his heart began to beat in harmony with nature.

He was thinking of Janet, and of Janet only. His thought of Margaret was vague, shadowy, intermittent, and without any restraining or impelling power. But Janet was clear cut and curiously vital. On whatsoever side he touched her, she sent a tingle through his frame. She had thrown him overboard, no doubt of that. A bold thing for a wife to do, when the thing pitched overboard happens to be her husband. The law gathers a quick frown, and the world passes it current, Good. Was she to blame? Hang the law and the world; the question was, Was she to blame? With a touch of chivalry that did not disgrace him, he ranged himself on her side, and gallantly answered, No.

She had damaged him, must have done, without true cause, in her father's eyes. If she had out with it and said, "Father, I left him because I found that you were right and I was wrong. It was he who robbed you and has ruined you. How could I live with him longer?" he would not have cared a pin's point. It would have been nothing new for the old man to learn. She had told another story, however. To justify herself in her own eyes, to say nothing of her father's, she must needs have invented something disgraceful. This was cruel, cruel beyond measure,

seeing that he had loved her and treated her like a royal lover. It cut him to the quick. Yet why had she swerved from the truth? Was it to further disgrace him in her father's estimation, or was it that she thought his real offence was the only one of any importance, the one not to be spoken of, not to be confessed, because unpardonable, unforgivable? Again he pulled himself together, and said to himself that what she did she did to shield him, out of kindness.

"A better woman never wore shoe-leather."

Her image was radiant, and for hours his thoughts circled round it, not like the hungry lion round the blazing camp-fire, terrified at the light it scorns, nor yet like the filthy bat dashing against and extinguishing the light it seeks. More like, rather, to the moth that worships the flame, to the land bird out at sea, tempest-driven, beating the light-house for succor. He did not curse, nor whine, nor drivel, nor snivel; only, his love, his true love, had got hold of him, and wrung him so that he groaned in spirit, and within him, like deep calling unto deep, was the cry, Oh, Janet! Janet! Janet!

He had no design, no definite thought, when he left the house. He followed an impulse which he did not care to resist. The morning was cloudless, and held promise of a day splendid with divine genius. As yet the day was young, with sparkling eyes of dew, cool, delicious, piquant, bursting with the tonic qualities of beauty, purity, and deep earth-smelling joy. Its virtue crept into the man's soul, through nostrils, eyes, and ears. It exalted him, so that he stood ready, unwittingly, for any perilous adventure of contrition, moral purpose, self-abnegation that circumstances might suggest.

The cottage was overshadowed by the big trees, ringed in with thick holly hedges, embedded in ivy from door-step to chimney-top. It was less a piece of architecture, to the eye, than a natural growth. The trees were out in force, and a blackbird in the garden was whistling with a magnificent abandon. Three hens were scratching, and a cock was challenging finely the distant crowings that came over hill and dale, on the far side of the cottage, which was common land, sandy, humpy, gorse-covered. A blind was pulled up, a window opened, a woman leaned on the window-sill, filling her lungs with glorious oxygen, drinking in the sweetness of the morning, her long hair flowing loose, and

only half concealing beauties that might have dazzled Phœbus with the strong eyes himself. She laughed at the blackbird, called out, "Good-morning, Sir Sable Plume. This is the way you do it. I know the trick." Then she whistled in a way that made Sir Sable cock his eye at her, stand on one leg, hop on to a holly branch, and finally make a melodious burst as full of richness as disdain.

The man saw her, heard her, nor closed his ears nor eyes, but drank it all in with all his senses, so that his heart shook.

By-and-by she came down, opened the door, and came into the garden. She touched a blossom or two caressingly, bent to inhale the subtile morning perfume of another, then she pulled back the swinging shutters that covered the two front windows, and went in-doors. Peering cautiously through the hedge, her name kept mounting to his tongue, and once he had even breathed audibly her name, "Janet!" A quick turn of her head startled him. He drew back, and it seemed to him that it had hastened her going in. Would she come out again? He waited a long time, and still she did not come. What then? What did he mean to do in any case? This sudden call upon him for a definite purpose, for a decision reducible to terms, gave him mental pause. He saw himself reflected as in a mirror. Something jarred upon him. It might have been—anything; his own image, or the mocking scream with which Sir Sable Plume flew over his head and across the park.

Just then he heard Janet's voice; she was talking to her father up-stairs. "I am going now, dear, for the milk;" so much he caught, straining his ears. For the milk—now where did she get milk from? There were two places, it occurred to him—the pump and the cow. In the country, it would surely be the cow: evidently he had not outlived all his illusions. But the cow—where? At the Hall? He drew behind a holly bush as she came forth. She did not come into the park, however, but crossed the garden and went out through a door. Behind that green shoulder of land, a few fields away, on the other side of the slice of common land, lay Dubley Farm. He knew it, and when he saw where she was going he was distinctly pleased, for he had tasted the Dubley milk, and knew that they had at least one cow that was not milked with a handle.

How sweet she looked as she tripped along with her spotless

pink cotton dress, her white frilled apron, and broad-brimmed hat of common straw that showed as dainty as a costly Gainsborough! so fresh, so charming, so simple as to fit her station, and yet so full of the lovely lines and subtle harmonies of movement found always and only with refined womanhood! The milk-can she carried in her hand gave the finishing touch to as delicate a piece of feminine pastoralism as a certain pair of eyes had ever beheld. He felt proud of her, so low and yet so high, so common and yet so choice.

"My wife!" he said, half aloud, and rose to the sweet word with an eagerness almost pathetic.

Out of view of the cottage, in a dip of the common, he awaited her return, with a palpitating heart. He sat on a stone beside a gorse bush, and she did not notice him till he stood up. Then—she dropped the can, and the milk formed a pool at her feet.

"Till yesterday I thought you were dead, my wife."

He put out both his hands towards her. She made no movement of response, only her lips moved.

"I was, I am—dead—to you."

"Tell me, why, why did you do it?" he said, heeding not her words.

"If you don't know, I cannot tell you. You would not understand."

There was a vibrant note of contempt in her reply. He noted it, and nothing more.

"It was cruel of you, wasn't it? I—I loved you so, Janet."

A soft flush overspread her face, that seemed exquisitely delicate and fascinating to him. It seemed to him so full of meaning.

"It would have been more cruel to have remained with you. When I discovered—you know what, my love for you died. I have prayed every day since that we may never meet again."

"But we have, thank Heaven we have, before it was too late! I have come to ask your forgiveness."

"For what?"

"You know what. You—"

She threw out a short, mocking laugh.

"How do I know? You have always denied it."

"I mean your father's affair, of course."

"My father's affair? That is too vague. I don't know what you mean."

He looked hard at her.

"I see. You wish a confession in so many words. Well, I am here to abase myself before you, Janet. I confess I did it, and—"

"It, it, it! Pray, what does 'it' signify?"

"I confess that it was I who waylaid your father, and robbed him of Lady Eden's jewels. I admit that I, Philip Tuer, played thief to David Reed."

He hung his head, while the blood burned his face.

"Yes, that is English, plain English, my—husband!"

It was like the home-thrust of a dagger.

"I have paid a price for them, Janet, beyond their market value. They have cost me my soul—unless you—"

"Do you know what they have cost him? His honor, his health, his happiness. Body and soul, you have blasted him. You don't look a bit blasted."

"You look at my ribs, my cheeks. They are not developments of the soul. Have you never known a tree to have its heart burned out by lightning, while its rind still stood fresh and whole? I tell you, my wife, my sole hope is in you. Oh, Janet, for the love you once bore me, forgive me! save me!"

He would have taken her hand, but she drew back with a movement of repulsion.

"What atonement have you made that I should forgive you?"

"Something, something, Janet. I have confessed my crime to you. To you a small thing, perhaps, but for me the greatest."

"Will you tell Lady Eden that you were the culprit, and not my father?"

"Haven't you told her already?"

"Ah, you refuse?"

"Not at all. I will tell Lady Eden the truth."

"Will you go to Fellby, publicly exonerate my father, and confess your crime to the bank authorities?"

His face grew pallid, and his hands were tightly clinched.

"You ask that of me? It is my home—think what that means—my father—my—"

"Yes, my father, too. There was his home, there his friends, and there he was cast out as a leper."

"I should catch it hot—years of prison life, Janet."

"Are you the only one that should escape degradation and

suffering? When you came out of prison I should at least respect you. Until I respect you again, Philip, I do not care to forgive you."

For some time there was silence between them. He turned aside, and stood like a statue, yet his spirit was the theatre of tragic strife; he wrestled not with flesh and blood. He was fighting hard for his manhood, for his soul.

He swung round, and, giving her a long steady look of tender love, said, "Janet, I love you—I will go to Fellby, and do as you wish. Are you content?"

Her eyelids quivered and fell, her lips trembled. She felt how he loved her. I think had he taken her without ceremony in his arms, she would have yielded, and perhaps he would have—well, damaged the story. He did not do so, however, and Janet rallied, shall we say her strength or her weakness?

"You forget my father. Do you owe no duty to him?"

"Have I not promised to pay it? When I proclaim myself guilty, I proclaim him innocent."

"That is your public duty to him. Have you no private, no personal duty to him?"

"He cannot demand more of me, I think."

"If he cannot, Philip, I can; and I do."

"You mean an apology?"

"Yes."

He shook his head.

"No, I cannot."

"You cannot! Why cannot you?"

"Because, Janet, I ha—"

He checked himself, hesitated a moment, and then said, "When I married you, Janet, I was what I was. It would have been better, of course, if I had been morally stronger, more independent; just as it would have been better if my father had bred me to an honorable profession or bound me to an honorable trade, instead of training me to be an idle gentleman. That, however, is so much idle speculation. I was what I was. I was your husband, the husband of David Reed's daughter. Cut by my friends, I lived under your father's roof. Did he try to guide me? to advise me? to help me? to make a man of me? Not an atom. I was malleable enough, God knows! He might have made a man of me. All he did, though, was to show his dislike and distrust of me.

Contempt, prejudice, scorn—that was all he gave me. More than that—he abused your ear, he did his best to wean your love from me. Nay, I know it. He repelled me, degraded me in my own eyes, made me sour, bitter, splenetic. I say he poisoned my wells, poisoned the springs of my moral and spiritual nature. It was he who made me capable of robbing him, nay, he made me capable of doing what was infinitely worse than robbing him. Yet he was a Good Man! And when your Good Man handles his goodness in the service of his prejudice, he is more dangerous than a troop of villains. I cannot, Janet, I cannot.”

“Father did not treat you fairly, I know. As you say, he was prejudiced. But you have had your revenge. You have ruined him in mind and body. You should make an effort to realize that, Philip.”

“He made me a—a villain—ah! you shrink from that. It is true, though. I have done him no such injury. The damage to his reputation I will repair. He will shine all the brighter for it. What reparation can he, will he, make me? I know you have the world on your side. It can appreciate the theft of a jewel, and the damage that affects a man’s market value. But the destruction of a soul—well, I don’t blame it. It is interested only in what it can understand, and the soul is something beyond it. No, Janet, not that. You ask too much of me.”

“Then I cannot forgive you!”

“Do you mean it?”

“I mean it.” Neither spoke for some minutes. It was going hard with Philip Tuer.

He broke the silence with, “When I have apologized to your father, seen Lady Eden, surrendered myself to justice at Fellby, been to prison for—never mind how long—and come out again, what then, my wife?”

“Then I will gladly forgive you, Philip.”

“Is that all?” he asked, quickly.

An expression of surprise seemed to creep into her eyes.

She murmured, “What more do you want?”

“You will live with me as my dear sweet wife again?”

She clasped her hands suddenly together, while a great shudder seemed to move her whole frame.

“Oh, don’t ask me, don’t ask me that!” she cried.

“Speak, wife, speak! tell me, you don’t mean—you will,

say you will—O my love, my love, of course you didn't—say it!"

"I cannot! no, no, no!"

"Ha! then he has done it at last—the devil!"

It sounded like the cry of a—wild beast? No. Like the cry of a lost soul. She caught one glance of his livid face, then she flew terror-stricken towards the cottage.

CHAPTER XLIX.

OF GAFFER BUCKET AND THE RUDE TRAIN.

THAT same evening the six-fifteen train from Ipstones-under-Water, connecting at Peakton with the London express, carried among its passengers the Countess of Eden, her ever true and faithful maid, Mamselle Elise, David Reed, and his daughter. Mamselle travelled in a second-class compartment together with the Reeds; the Countess alone in the next compartment, which was first-class. Janet, thinking of her husband, felt like a prisoner that had broken jail and was making good her escape. Francisca, thinking of the same individual, felt like a jailer in charge of prisoners. The one was glad and the other was sad, and both had a sense of personal humiliation keener than they cared to acknowledge even to themselves.

Thus it happened that when Aunt Rebecca, on the following morning, ordered up her dainty phaeton and pair of chestnut ponies and drove over to Wigwell Grange, she was unable to put to the Countess those few pertinent and searching questions which she had revolved so carefully in her mind. Her disappointment was great; she had built, it seemed to her, almost everything on the interview. A quick and sudden sensation of helplessness almost overwhelmed her. Her darling was standing on the brink of the precipice, while she herself, a miserable paralytic, was unable to move hand or foot or tongue to save her. She could not even blink; could only stare like a corpse with living eyes. I am not at all sure that she did actually feel thus,

but she did say to herself that such were her feelings, and we ought all of us to be prepared to take something for granted.

It was some consolation, however, to receive the address of the Countess's agents in London, together with the assurance that any communication intrusted to them would certainly be forwarded to her ladyship, though they were not instructed to furnish any one with her ladyship's address. Rebecca was conscious that she seldom showed to advantage as a letter-writer. The art was one she could not subdue; it seemed to express only one side of her nature. For stiffness, austerity, and coldness her pen was an instrument of excellent use; but for the expression of her whole character, of her true self, it was worse than useless, it was a wretched traitor and traducer. If she could only have fastened a pen to her tongue now—but there, there, not another syllable on the awful subject. Only, men and brethren, hats off, and thank the Powers for not including the things that might have been in the category of the things that are.

On her return home, Rebecca retired to her own room and wrote to the Countess, an occupation that consumed some hours. Meanwhile Silas had a talk with Priscilla, and Cowp with Margaret.

Husband and wife were alone together in the latter's boudoir. For our Lady of Fancy had now her boudoir, and a killingly sweet symphony of delicate tints it was, too. I believe her first fancy after she was weaned was grafted on this boudoir stock. The top of all her dreams was this same boudoir. And now, Heaven bless her, she had one, and she was in it, and Silas too, a fly in amber. He had brought in an arm-chair from a neighboring apartment, feeling a trifle shy of the slender-legged, albeit satin-clad, soft-tinted, feminine-looking creations that passed for chairs in this dream of a room. Priscilla, in a morning-robe that seemed to melt and mingle with the surrounding harmony of color, lay in a semi-recumbent position on a couch. Calm and spiritual was her countenance, and her eyes were full of the light of the soul behind them—the soul that swam in the rich seas of fancy, and was at home there, as the sea-bird on the sea.

“It isn't Madge's doing, I'm sure. She says she is willing, I know; but God bless me, the girl doesn't love him! That's as plain as a pikestaff. I can't make head or tail of it.”

Priscilla smiled at this honest confession of native masculine

dulness, as who should say, since when was it expected of a man to understand the workings of a feminine head or heart?

In words she said, "Surely, Silas, you do not expect our daughter to be wearing her heart on her sleeve—to be showing her love for a man before she is his wife?"

"Well, her mother did, as I know of. Why, you used to carry your heart, not on your sleeve—you were not such a booby as that—but in your eyes and on your lips, and everywhere where you thought I could get at it. And for the same I loved you not the less, but the more. The sight of an honest girl's love, to my thinking, is beautiful as a rosebud. And I don't know what a man is made of who is willing to take the thorn of a wife without first making sure of the flower of her love."

"You are blunt, Silas, very blunt, if not rude. Moreover, you are unjust to Mr. Roy. I think we both have need to feel grateful to him. Think what—"

"I hope I may never live to be ungrateful, wife. 'Tis a mean offence, and speaks a beggarly nature. All the same, if Digby Roy looks for his pay in marrying Madge, then, dash it, I say he's no honest merchant, but an infernal usurer. Why, at his time of life, I'd have gone, not once to Wyoming, but round the world a dozen times at my own expense, and then have felt that I had only just begun the travels that could stand me as a claim to such a girl as our Madge. I'd have done it, Priscilla, for you even," he said, with a sudden change of tone in his last words that caused Priscilla to meet his eyes with a look and a smile that did him good.

"It will be time enough, dear, to abuse Mr. Roy when you know that he entertains any such ridiculous ideas. What did you say to him?"

"Say to him! I said if Margaret and you were satisfied with the arrangement, I was. I added, if Becky had been satisfied too, it would have been better all round."

"Oh, as for Rebecca, it is ridiculous of her. Those she happens to like are all saints, and the rest sinners."

"Happen her doctrine is sound, wife. If we are not sheep, then we are goats, you know."

"Perhaps so. But the test is not Rebecca's friendship. The truth is, she prefers the American."

"I'm not sure but what I do, too. He's got what are oftener found apart than together, money and brains."

"My dear, are you a judge?" asked Priscilla, with a soft pur. Silas laughed.

"I don't say the other hasn't got brains. If anything, he has too many. But his money, wife, have you seen the color of it?"

"We can afford to give them all they need. She is our only child. Mr. Cowp is a very nice man, and, for an American, a gentleman. But in a son-in-law I prefer the genuine, native article."

"Are you sure you are getting it?"

"His father was a baronet, I believe. I think, though, that he is dead now. Anyway, the Countess has known him for years. I had a talk with her the other day. For reasons, he has cut himself quite loose from his family. You know these—"

"If the Countess knows him, it's all right. That woman's a— a woman," said Silas, getting onto his feet.

"And you are evidently a—a man." Priscilla threw out at him. It hit him harmlessly in the back, for he laughed as he passed from the room.

Margaret and Cowp were in the low shrubbery, under high rocks, with the brawling stream at their feet. He had led her there for the sake of solitude, and she had allowed herself to be led there for the same reason. She felt that she owed him much, and she was the wrong kind of girl to shirk meeting any creditor, especially one who was armed like Cowp with a just claim against the estate of her honor and affection.

"I have just been with Mr. Roy. Speak, is this thing true that he says?"

She told him it was true. Frankness was supreme kindness in such a cruel moment, and Margaret was frank.

"Everything gone! No name—no heritage—no love! Gone all!" he said at intervals, like one to whom speech was agony. She did not understand it all, but enough to know that he felt his ship was wrecked. She pitied him? Quite too much to show it. He was hit hard. He did his best to bear it like a man.

"You said this could never be, when I asked you," he said, in a tone of sad wonder.

"At that time I thought it never could be. You do not think I deceived you?"

"No, no, God forbid! On my honor, no. Only, you have changed, Margaret."

"I have not changed, not a whit—except in this: I have promised to marry him."

He took a step towards her, and looked at her keenly.

"You love him, though?" he said, almost in a whisper.

"Then I must have changed. Have you forgotten the other night?"

Just for one moment she gave him glance for glance, a proud tribute of her truthfulness, then her eyes fell, and the blood leaped flaming to her face. No, he had not forgotten, nor was he ever likely to forget, the "other night."

"You do not love him, yet you marry him. You love me, yet you will not marry me. Margaret, this is no more English conduct than it is American. I don't understand it. There must be compulsion somewhere. Isn't it so?"

"Yes, in a sense it is. In another sense it is not. It is my duty. And it is my duty to do my duty."

His answer was a brave one.

"Your duty is to wed where you love. Fly with me, my love. We will be out of England in twelve hours. When you are my wife, we will discuss the question at our leisure. But now we must do and dare. Come, fly with me, my love!"

The thought made her giddy. What a heaven it would be to fly away with him, and be at rest! She thought of her mother, and yet more and more of her father, and what he would suffer if her mother's shame were discovered. She looked at the man she loved, and a great sob broke from her. It shook him sorely. And to see her fight down her surging emotion was a piteously brave sight. Presently she came close to him.

"You must go from here soon. Go to-night if you can, for my sake. Some day, perhaps, God grant it may be so! you will learn why I have thus sacrificed you. Farewell, loved one, farewell!"

She put up her hands and kissed him on the brow, and was gone.

Gaffer Bucket insisted that evening in seeing with his own eyes that Cowp's luggage was properly labelled and put in the guard's van at Ipstones-under-Water. Cowp shook hands with him heartily as the train came in, and left a ten-pound note glued to the old man's palm.

"I'm mighty disappointed in you, sir—clean sould," he said, shaking his wise sconce.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Bucket. What do you mean?" said Cowp, getting into the coach.

"Well, sir, to start like a race-'oss, and to end like a moke! An' fur Sparrer-hawk, too, to cut—"

When Gaffer Bucket had finished his sentence the train was a quarter of a mile down the line.

CHAPTER L.

OF AN OLD SORROW UNDER A NEW SKY.

THE Breton Dax had its feet in a narrow valley and its head on a wide heath. The heath was sombre and wild under cloud, but under sunshine there was dark rich beauty in the open expanse of ling and furze and broom. The valley was watered by a stream, its sides were well wooded, and on the side opposite Dax the hills made up in boldness of outline for lack of height. Lower down the valley there was an opening into the hills, through which was a winding road to Brés, some leagues distant.

Along this road, half a league from Dax, was the Château St. Fond. It crowned a rugged cliff, and possessed one of the finest outlooks in Brittany. With the waning of the summer one might have searched the world over and not have found Francisca, Countess of Eden, unless one had for one's sins been making the journey between Brés and Dax, and chanced to tarry at the château in the air, having first climbed up to it for a penance.

Behind the château was a little valley, entirely surrounded by steep slopes wooded from top to bottom. The pass was by a gorge, diminutive enough, but amusingly savage in aspect. It looked as terrible as an angry lion-whelp. The bottom of this natural basin was rich pasturage of a bright green color, in striking contrast with the dark frowning sides. On a grassy knoll was a forester's cottage, built partly of stone and partly of mud; and the part that was of mud was stronger, drier, warmer, and prettier than the part that was of stone. This was the new home of Janet and her father,

Above them in the sky hung St. Fond, not frowning, but ever smiling, a quaint embodiment of beneficence. For there dwelt Francisca, the Blessed Lady, who often waved a flag or blew a silver horn, and the puzzle then was to find where she was perched, on what tower or balcony, at what gable or window. A Breton lad, with a fancy for red trousers and violet vest, milked the cows, cut wood, fetched water from the spring, and chattered French chock-full of his own peculiar patavinity, with the grimaces of a monkey. Otherwise Janet chose to be alone, and do her own work. She sang at her work, and felt, she said, ten years younger.

With Pierre for a guide, David Reed took to the woods and hills and the *landes* beyond Dax; also he took to the composite tongue of Pierre, and found it like a ripe peach in his mouth. In these days and among these adventures, the old man sorrowfully forgot himself, would whistle, smile often, and even laugh aloud. Pierre supplied him with wholesome food for laughter. He appeared to do much the same kindness for Pierre. They got on well together. Happy Brittany!

Unfortunately, happiness is not an herb of the field, universally distributed though favoring certain latitudes. It is a spiritual growth, separate in its origin, and native only to its possessor. There is an art in growing it, and a science also, and both exquisitely subtile. That it is rare follows as a consequence. Nothing is more surprising than that any one should affect surprise at its rarity. Life is common enough; you cannot find the bit of rubbish that is not ready on occasion to break out into the mystery, the miracle, the teeming vulgarity of life. But perfect life is only less scarce than utter lifelessness. Now happiness is the fine bloom and melody of life. It will become common when the moon drops millstones.

Brittany held no root of happiness for Francisca. On the contrary, it almost seemed as if the romantic stretch of country between Dax and Brés grew only trees and plants and wild flowers, whose roots were poisoned, and whose exhalations mounted to the brain, there to be transmuted into fever and frenzy, into fear, reproach, and horror. Francisca's loyalty to the memory of the Philip Tuer of the Carpathian Mountains was curious. He had given her companionship, sympathy, love, at the most critical moment of her life. That was the supreme fact of her life. Of course she ought to have buried that fact, forgotten it, ignored it,

if need were, have denied it. Your shallow worldling has this trick of mental and moral detachment from the past. Francisca was a worldling, but not shallow. There was a mental evasion and denial that landed one in sheer vulgarity, like the scared footpad flying from the fat constable. There were dark abysses of immorality down which one might dance to the tune of disloyalty and ingratitude, while singing the holy songs of religion and morality. The plain truth was that some things could not tempt Francisca; they appealed to nothing in her nature. To have been false to the memory of Philip Tuer would have been to vulgarize and degrade herself.

He had evidently taken a less exalted view of the situation. Therein lay the sting for her. He had taken her unawares, and almost before she knew what he was doing, and quite before she knew what she was doing, he had made her his accomplice in a deed that revolted her. Now he was about to commit a yet worse offence, and again she was his accomplice. And this time her eyes were open, and she knew what she was doing. Mr. Digby Roy, it is true, was doing poor service to the memory of the Philip Tuer of the Carpathian Mountains. But what he did not do, Francisca did for him—she put an impassable height between the one and the other, and kept the image of her heart unclouded and unstained. He was then what he was. Now he was, Heaven forgive her! what she had made him. He had sinned for her at the start, so she told herself. And if he now sinned against her, against others, was not a share, the larger share, of the blame hers?

Even now her thought was very little of Margaret, and less of Janet, and least of all of herself. The thought that was as fire in her brain was that *he* was about to burden his conscience with another crime. How to save him from himself, that was the question. There seemed but one way, and that was purgatorial. She was equal to the sacrifice of herself. And what more could be said of her than that, seeing she had so much to lose and would inevitably lose all? Only one thing held her back, and that was Muriel, the sweet, innocent, beautiful, budding child, Muriel. Her mother's love turned on her now with terrible rage and strength. The sacrifice of herself meant, ah! Heaven only knew what it meant for her child. Therein lay the ground of her inward strife, her fearful agony of spirit.

Twice a week she received her correspondence by way of her town agents. He did not write to her, but everybody else did, notably Cowp and Rebecca. The latter asked her a few questions concerning Mr. Digby Roy that cut to the heart of the matter in a keen, cool, surgical manner that appalled Francisca. The answers were not so much to the point as the questions.

One morning early in September, David Reed came from the garden, and, leaning against the door, stood watching Janet. She was making up butter for the château, within the shadow of a big beech-tree.

"When did the Countess say, Janet, that she was going to be married?"

"I think she said in a fortnight from yesterday. But I am not sure," answered Janet, who had small desire to let her thoughts wander beyond St. Fond and its neighborhood.

"I wonder who this Mr. Digby Roy is. You must write to her, Janet. A fine true-hearted girl is Margaret Oldcastle, to my thinking. Didn't the Blessed Lady say that he came from America?"

"Yes, I think so."

"I hope he isn't an American. Though what am I saying? A good American is better than a bad Englishman, one would think. I always think of America as full of bad Englishmen. I don't know why, unless it is because that rogue—"

"Father," interrupted Janet quickly, "let the dead bury their dead. I wish you would go and leave word at the château for the carrier to bring some flour from Brés. We are almost out of it."

"Mighty poor sextons are the dead. They leave their kindred only half buried, with their toes sticking out of the ground. I shouldn't mind if—"

Janet dropped her butter-pats, and coming to her father, said, "Now, dearest, not another word. This spot is clean, and as you love me, father mine, let us keep it so. Look at the blue sky, not a taint on it. The air, sweet as angels' breath."

She plucked a rose.

"Smell, dear, how delicious! Don't you hear the drowsy hum of the dumbledors? Listen, the song of the laverock! O for the soul of a lark! There, go order the flour, and let me not see your face again, sir, until I have made my butter and baked my bread."

With a kiss she pushed him off, and he went.

Out of her hearing, he murmured, "O for the soul of a lark!" There was passion in that—pain, too—I heard it. Poor lassie, I'm apt to forget that she's got the iron in her, too. Oh, that rogue, that rogue! If I could only have him in my power for one hour! Not he. He'll keep away from England, that's pretty sure."

Half-way up the steep hill-path leading to St. Fond was an old quarry that had supplied the stone for the building of the château. It had not been worked for a century, and time had hidden all the wound, and mellowed the scar into a patch of beauty. On a moss-covered block of hewn stone at the entrance to the quarry, David Reed sat and breathed himself. Presently he heard a step, and the Countess came in sight, round a bend in the path above him. He rose and greeted her.

"I was coming to see you," she said, "but it is better so. Let us go farther from the path. I want to talk with you."

She led the way into the quarry, and he followed her.

"Sit down here, beside me," she said, and he obeyed her.

Her eyes were on the ground, which she tapped with her foot. He looked at her closely, and thought her gloriously beautiful, but her face seemed troubled, he thought. This was enough to trouble him, for the ground this woman trod was to the old man sacred.

"You are troubled about something, I am afraid," he said, after a while.

"You are right, I am."

Then she laughed, it seemed so absurd. In the world of High Politics she held high rank as a dexterous and subtle diplomatist; and here she was, an open book to be read at sight by an old bank clerk!

"Can I serve you in any way? I would go to death for you, my lady. In my dishonored age only your kindness—"

She interrupted him with a gesture.

"Spare me your thanks, David Reed. I do not deserve them. They cut me to the quick."

"Not deserve my thanks! my deepest gratitude! aye, my pious devotion! Blessed lady, you have only been too good, too generous, too nobly kind to an old man innocent, before God in heaven innocent, but by the world thought guilty, and punished as such,"

His voice broke, and a sudden spasm of sympathetic emotion seized Francisca. She was evidently high wrought just now.

"My friend—I may call you my friend, may I not?" she asked, in a tone that brought the old man to his feet in a moment, saying, "You overwhelm me with your goodness."

"I am selfish in this, for now I need you as my friend."

"Were I a king, my lady, I would lay my kingdom at your feet. Against the world, you have believed in my innocence."

"Small merit on my part, alas! I have come to tell you how I knew that you were innocent. It was because I knew only too well who was guilty."

"You knew who it was, then?" he cried, excitement working in his face and hands.

"Be seated, please. Thank you. Yes, I knew. Your suspicions were—were true. It was Philip Tuer."

"And you knew it—all the time?" he asked, with a quivering voice.

"I knew it. Think of it—through all these years of your cruel shame and suffering, I knew it. I could have told you who robbed you. I could have restored you to your rightful place among honorable men. Nay, at the start I could have saved you from your fall. To your face I tell it you, David Reed—it is true. Now, have I been too good, too generous, too nobly kind? Speak, man; what have you to say to it? I have a strange itching to hear some plain honest English. What think you, David Reed?"

CHAPTER LI.

OF THE COUNTESS AND DAVID REED.

THE old man shook like one sick of the palsy. He fumbled with his hands.

"Your ladyship is not well, I think," he said, slowly.

"I tell you, it is true."

"My lady, my Blessed Lady, I will believe you mad—the victim of a delusion—anything. But I cannot—God help me!—I will not believe *that*."

His voice broke; elbows on his knees, he covered his face with his hands, and sobbed like a child. Francisca gazed at him with wild eyes hot and dry.

"To tear up by its roots a living, beautiful faith like that! Fit work for a devil to delight in!" she murmured, half aloud, while horror sat upon her face and stared from her eyes.

It seemed a long while to the moment when David Reed lifted himself up and repeated to himself twice: "*If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do? If the foundations be destroyed, what shall the righteous do?*"

"Then, my lady, how came you to know that it was Philip Tuer?"

She drew in her breath sharply, like one in sudden pain.

"I will tell you—I came on purpose to tell you all. He was—he had been my lover."

"Philip Tuer your lover!"

"It was before he was married."

"But the Earl—your husband—"

"Ah! if Heaven had no better argument against me than has he I should not fear my punishment. His coldness and cruelty had filled me with despair. Philip Tuer saved me from madness or death, or both. I cannot forget what I owe him. I must shield him at any cost from himself."

"But they were your jewels. I cannot see clear," said the old man, whose brain was hardly equal to the task of marshalling in order the intruding crowd of new and painful ideas.

"He wanted money. I had not enough. I dare not give him my jewels. You had come to take them back. He told me to detain you a while. I don't think he told why; yet I knew, yes, I knew, in a dim, far-off way. I did not realize what I was doing, though. I don't think I thought of you at all. I thought only of my baby girl, of saving my name for her sake. And yet—"

"Let me have it clear, clear, my lady. You mean, he threatened you?"

"Yes, he did. It wasn't like him. I could not believe it at first. Ha, how he had altered! When I knew what he meant, I would rather have died than have lived to hear it. I thought only of my child. She will know it all—that is my punishment. Her mother's sin—shame—utter disgrace—but not her suffering, not her sorrow."

"I was content to feel that you believed me innocent. Why did you tell me this? Why didn't you let me die believing in you, aye, thinking you closer akin to divinity than humanity? I am an old man, and—and I love my idols," he moaned, with a touch of spiritual despair not remote from the tragical.

Francisca felt it so; and having a soul of her own that had felt the same dread touch, his words affected her in a manner quite incomprehensible to one who has not a soul, or to one whose soul has not been seasoned with some of the rarer salts of experience. She was speechless; she could only clasp her hands convulsively, and stare with wide, wild, beautiful eyes, as behind the veil she caught glimpses of a spirit, driven from the bright heights of Hope and Faith, rushing blindly down the dark slopes that led whither no man knew, save that the valley of the Great Shadow was there.

He looked intently at her, as if to read her soul in her face and eyes.

"Poor woman!" he said, as to himself. "She does not even ask me to forgive her."

"I cannot. I have no right to. I have not yet wrought my expiation to the end."

"But I am eager to forgive you. I must, or I shall go mad. The quality of mercy is not strained. I forgive you, my lady. Blessed lady, I forgive you—for your sorrow's sake. You will let me, won't you?"

This was too much for Francisca. Her hot eyes filled with tears, a sweet relief, while she fell upon her knees before David Reed, murmuring, "Noble, noble old man, on my knees I thank you."

"No, no, not that, not that, not to me! Blessed lady, rise—please—so—yes, yes, thank you a thousand times. Put it all out of your mind—forget it. The bitterness is all over now," he ran on, as he raised her up and sought to comfort her, in a manner that was a quaint amalgam of fatherly affection and ceremonious old-fashioned courtliness.

Like a winter's sun breaking through cold, gray clouds was the smile she gave him, as she said: "Not yet, my friend, not yet; the bitterness has only just begun. Not yet is my shame bruited abroad all over the land. Not yet have I lost my name, my home, my reputation, my child, my all. These things will not be

sweet. Like you, I shall come to think the whole world knows me, my offence, my punishment. Like you, I shall cower from the sight of men. Like you, I shall cry aloud and in vain for death to come."

"May the good God forbid it! What need is there of this? Not on my account, surely? If I thought so I would be a dead man before to-morrow's sunrise."

"'Twill not be your doing, dear friend. I have to deal with—one who has grown cruel, I am afraid. I told you yesterday that Margaret Oldcastle was to be married within a fortnight."

"Yes, to a Mr. Digby Roy."

"Do you know who this Mr. Digby Roy is?"

"Never heard the name before. You said something about him being an American."

"Not being an American, but having lived there. He is an Englishman. His real name is—Philip Tuer!"

He burst out laughing.

"You are jesting, my lady," he said, and laughed again.

"It is no jest, I am sorry to say. Digby Roy is Philip Tuer."

"The villain, villain!" he cried aloud, shaking his fist in the air, while his face grew pale with rage, and his frame tottered. He would have fallen, had not Francisca supported him and led him gently to his seat.

"You must be careful. You are not strong. Keep calm, my friend, for my sake," she said, soothing him with all her woman's sweet skill of word and touch and inarticulate sound.

After a while the old man raised his chin from his chest, and asked, in a quiet tone, "Does Janet know?"

"No."

"Promise me you won't tell her?"

"If you wish, yes, I promise you. She knows that he is in England, that he has been in the neighborhood of Abbot's Hey, that—has she told you anything?"

"Not a word."

"Well, she has seen him, she—"

"Seen him? Janet has seen him?"

"And spoken to him."

"Ha—indeed!"

His face grew very dark.

"Perhaps she'll go away again with him, and leave me all

alone," he growled under his breath. The old Adam was evidently stirring himself again.

"No, I do not fear that—something far worse. I am not sure that she has done her duty by him. He loves her—and when a man loves a woman, she has his destiny in her keeping. She repulsed him, I understand. He thought her dead. He finds her living, yet dead—I mean—all her love for him dead. I would not, I dare not, judge another. But if I stood in Janet's shoes—and I have told her so—I should feel myself a wicked, heartless woman."

David Reed listened attentively to Francisca's words, and as she progressed, the thunder-cloud lifted from his countenance, over which, at the conclusion, the sunshine of a happy smile played.

"Thank Heaven she has got some good sound sense left in her head! So she put the rogue off, eh? Snapped her fingers at him, eh? 'Carry your eggs to another fair, where pates are addled, my good fellow,' she said, did she? Bravo, Janet, bravo!"

He put his hands together in a hearty clap.

"Ah, you hate him, I see," cried Francisca, who began to see certain things from Tuer's point of view.

"I have good cause, I think, good cause," he answered, with a chuckle that sounded quite wicked in her ears.

"But you have not always had good cause. Are you sure you did not hate him without a cause?"

"Belike I did, belike I didn't. He has justified 'it all, the scoundrel."

"We are apt to become what people think us. If we riddle the dikes with holes, how can we expect them to stand when the spate comes? You undermine a man's integrity when you doubt it, David Reed. Men will rise to confidence, and they will sink under distrust."

"Which means, I suppose, that the gentle rogue has been more sinned against than sinning? 'Tis the new charity of the times to pity the culprit and ignore the victim."

"My friend, oh, help me! He has done you sore damage. He will do me at least equal damage. You will be restored the moment your innocence is proclaimed. I shall never be restored, being guilty. Yet when he has done his worst to both of us, what real damage to us, to our real selves, has he done compared with

the damage we two have done to him, to his character, to his soul? Your hate, distrust, disloyalty. My selfish acceptance of an affection that probably first loosed the moral bonds of his nature. Oh, Philip, Philip! I have sinned against Heaven and before thee!"

"There, there, my lady, my Blessed Lady, don't, don't! Your sobs will break my heart. Don't cry, oh, don't cry! I'll do anything you want. I didn't know that I was the villain, but I was, I was. If you are in for an ounce, I am for a p—pound!"

So far the old man got at a headlong pace, and then *he* broke and fell, and together they wept the bitter sweet *tears* and shared the delicious pains of repentance.

The next day found the Château St. Fond deserted, save by a few servants who remained in charge; and by the following Sunday all Abbot's Hey knew that Lady Eden had returned to Wigwell Grange, for the wedding of Miss Margaret, the gossips said. It was added as a small item of local interest that the Reeds were at home again. Where they had been, nobody knew or cared.

CHAPTER LII.

OF THE COUNTESS AND PHILIP TUER.

MR. DIGBY ROY was in town. He had a good appetite for his breakfast, and he was going to be married in five days, and yet he was not a happy man. On the contrary, he was a miserable man. His spirit was dark. Janet's rejection of him had driven out the light. The unclean spirits had got hold of him: he would go through with the business now, cost what it might.

The waiter brought him a telegram. It ran, *Shall I come up, or will you come down? I must see you to-day.* It was signed, *Francisca, Wigwell Grange.*

"The deuce! what's up now? . . . thought she was in Algeria or Asia Minor . . . wonder what has brought her back . . . can't have brought them . . . dare not . . . some idiotic whim . . . another month of this kind of thing would about finish me . . .

which is it to be? Better trot down there . . . nobody need know . . . would she have thrown me off like . . . she'd have seen somebody at the devil first . . . I've treated her badly . . . confound it . . . about the only living soul that cares a rap what becomes of me . . . treated her like a villain . . . noble soul . . . hope to goodness she isn't going to play the fool, though . . . too late now . . . if the Earl were only dead . . . Gad, I'd do a penance for seven years and then . . ."

He laughed inwardly at his thought, drank his coffee, sent off a telegram, and a couple of hours later seated himself in the mid-day express for Peakton. He left the train at the junction between Peakton and Ipstones-under-Water, and drove ten miles across country to Wigwell Grange. For some reason not clear even to himself he sent in his name as Mr. Philip Tuer.

When Francisca heard it, a little thrill went through her, her face lighted up, and she murmured to herself, "That sounds like himself. Ah, if he would only be true to himself!"

She did not keep him long waiting. She came to him arrayed in all the charm of her beauty, her exquisite graciousness, her womanly sweetness.

"Thank you for coming, Philip—Philip Tuer."

"I thought it would be better—"

He hesitated.

She supplied, "Than Digby Roy. I like your taste in discarding—not in choosing names. Digby Roy—sounds like what it is!"

He flushed a bit, and again Francisca felt a jet of gladness, for the man before her, she knew, was no school-boy.

"I thought you were summering at the North Pole. How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Only a few days," she answered.

"Where, may I ask, did you leave the—things that are shaken by the wind?"

"The Reeds? Oh, they have come back home."

"Indeed—hum—oh—ah—well—the deuce—I trust that their short trip to the Continent has been beneficial to their health?" he said, with a light, mocking laugh that veiled the fierce uprising of passion within him.

"I know what you are thinking, Philip; what you are feeling. I should not have come back, nor would they, nor should I have have sent for you, unless—"

"Ha! thank you, thank you greatly. The sooner we come to the point the better. Pray, continue. Unless—"

"Unless I had made up my mind to save you from yourself, Philip, at all costs."

"Still, as ever, my good angel! How sweetly romantic it sounds! How if I don't want to be saved, my lady?"

"Then I must do it in spite of you."

He laughed and said, "On my life, a pretty little morality play. Only, ill-timed, ill-timed. There is a time for everything, my lady, and everything should be in its time. You are too late, too late. Why, in three days I shall have a wife, and—"

"You have a wife already, Philip."

"I have a wife, do you say? 'Fore God I have not! A wife? A woman bound to me by legal ties, and with a legal right to worry me, if you like. But no wife. She has thrown me overboard. She will not have me at any price, though I go to prison to clear her father's name. I would have done—well, her will, be it what it might. When I saw her, I knew how I loved her. She threw me overboard like a dead dog. I will have a wife, I say."

"I do not defend her conduct. I think—defend her! I—"

"You think you wouldn't have done it, eh? No, I'm sure you wouldn't. If I gave you the same chance to forgive me as I gave Janet, you would do it, I am quite sure."

"Won't you try me, Philip?"

"No, it doesn't pay. You will get these Reeds away again, to-morrow at the latest. Their presence is dangerous. They must go."

"They cannot. David Reed knows all."

"What do you mean by 'all'?"

"He knows that Digby Roy is Philip Tuer. He knows that the man who is going to marry Margaret Oldcastle is his son-in-law. He knows that the man who robbed him of the jewels was—yourself."

"You have told him this? You have dared to!"

He was on his feet, his face white with passion, his utterance half choked.

"I have told him—everything—my share in the crime, Philip."

He advanced a step towards her, and again retreated,

"Look you, my lady, for less than you have done, men have done murder, murder, my lady."

"I am not afraid of you, Philip. And oh, believe me, I am sorry, sorry for you. But you will not suffer alone, I—"

"Yes, yes, yes. Do you know, Francisca, Countess of Eden, what this fool's play will cost you?" he said, his voice low and tremulous with rage.

"Yes, I know. I have something to lose, Philip Tuer, as well as you, and I shall lose it all."

"You are prepared to do this?"

"Yes, I am. Nay, it is because I, too, shall suffer that I have dared to do what I have. You have me in your power. Do not spare me! If I had been safe, and you only had been the one to suffer, Philip, rather than have betrayed you I would have died!"

What more could a woman say? What more could a man expect? The ring in her voice was bright and brave as the light in her eyes. She looked transcendently beautiful. She spoke like herself. He hardened his heart in vain against her noble spirit. Her words, her spirit, stormed him, and would take no denial. In his rage he worshipped her.

"Yes," he said, blinking under the glory of her impassioned face and direct fearless glance—"yes, you are in my power beyond a doubt. And you are no common woman either. You are an earl's wife. You are a personage, almost a celebrity. All England will ring with it. The cold, the chaste, the clever, the proud, brilliant beauty, the Lady Eden, the mistress and accomplice of a broken gentleman turned footpad! Partner in a plot to steal her own jewels! Romantic? Why, the whole world will gape and wonder, tattle and gossip, over it for six months. The clubs, won't they roll it in their mouths as a savory morsel! The coteries, the circles exclusive—you know them—the dear sweet creatures, what faces, what exclamations, what horrors, what hysterics! Well, you have brought it on yourself, remember, and on your child. Ah, the child stabs you, I see, you grow pale, you—"

"Mercy, have mercy! Oh, my God!" broke from her in a wild cry, a cry that drove the blood from Tuer's heart.

He had been doing something spiritually akin to what the fetish-monger does when, in his wrath, he abuses and pummels his idol. His mood was fundamentally primitive and savage,

and Francisca's sudden outburst of agony affected him very much as a devout fetish-monger would be affected if his sacred image resented its castigation with a squeak of pain. He retreated, turned, gave one scared look, bowed, vanished. The tricks of the Barbarian are still in the blood, and at critical moments, when the blood is stirred, it is curious to note their action.

Tuer spent the night in a desolate room in an old decayed inn, once a noted posting-house, that stood on a deserted high-road within a couple of miles of Wigwell Grange. To the disgust of the people of the inn he neither ate nor drank, but locked himself in, having first secured a good supply of candles and coals, for the night was chilly and the room musty and damp. To be or not to be, was the question that thrust itself upon him and demanded a decisive answer. And when a man with a clear, cool head is brought to look the question calmly in the face, to weigh the pros and cons with a judicial impartiality, it is at least certain that that man has reached the crisis of his life. To that point had Philip Tuer now come. Was he to live or was he to die? His inclination was to die: what had he to live for?

"If I do—I know her—she will charge herself with my death." He was thinking of Francisca. "She had faith in me . . . she has . . . no common woman . . . she cared for me . . . I am . . . Good heavens . . . can I be utterly . . . can she be an utter fool to think . . . no, no . . . I could, I know I could . . . something to live for . . . to go down like that . . . to blast the very roots of her faith in me . . . Gad, I can't, I won't, I'll be d——d if I do!"

Such was the bond that held him to life. A fool? Possibly. But no coward, and evidently not dead to the divine charm of the principle of faith in human nature, which is the rock on which every genuine religion rests, and is the supreme note always of the supremely divine man and woman. The decision that he would live was followed, naturally enough, by a sudden fit of hard hunger. Every one was in bed, however, and the occasional growl of a fierce-looking bull-terrier down-stairs checked all inclination to descend and forage for himself. He had a couple of biscuits in his pocket, and with these and a glass of water he needs must be content. He poked the fire, lit his pipe, and smoked, with knitted brows, and a stern look on his face.

By-and-by he pulled out writing materials from his small travelling trunk, and began to write. He wrote for hours. The sun was shining when he collected his several letters into one parcel, which he carefully tied and sealed, and addressed to

The Right Honorable
The Countess of Eden,
Wigwell Grange.
Private.

After breakfast he sent the package by the landlord to its destination, and upon his return he left the inn and was driven to the station.

Late in the afternoon he arrived at Fellby.

CHAPTER LIII.

OF THE LIGHT AT EVEN-TIDE.

FRANCISCA sat in a low chair in front of the fire in her bedroom reading Philip Tuer's letter. She had read it through a dozen times, and now for the twentieth time she dipped here and there, picking out a few sentences at a time. We take them so delivered:—

“I have written, as you will see, to Margaret Oldcastle declaring the engagement ‘off.’ My jilting her will be no offence in her eyes, so that, luckily, I am not contracting a new guilt. . . . I should consider it a kindness on your part if you would give Mrs. Oldcastle to understand *privately* that I do not blame her in the least, and that she may rely upon my discretion. She will understand what I mean, though you do not. . . . David Reed will learn everything in good time. He will get his vindication and my sincere malediction. . . . By-the-bye, is it necessary that the Oldcastles

I should learn anything concerning Janet and me? If it got out it would go like the wind. It would do no good, and would only cause suffering to Margaret Oldcastle, and rejoice the heart of the she-dragon, her aunt. All you would have to do would be to gag Old-Righteousness-Turned-Sour. . . .

"I do not know the present address of the Duke of Capel Cod; I mean your friend Cowp. I will thank you to forward the enclosed letter. They love each other and should marry. I have no doubt they will. But as queer things and unexpected crop up pretty often in this world, let me beg of you to charge your conscience with the duty of doing *all in your power* to bring them together in marriage. Do this for my sake. . . . I want you to keep a package I shall send you until Cowp is Margaret's husband, then give it to him and not before. Guard it well, as much hangs on it. If he does not marry her, on the day when either of them marries see that all the package contains is burned to ashes. . . . I am going to own up and take my punishment like a man. . . . My worst punishment will not be prison, but the thought of the shame and disgrace with which I shall cover my father, my family, my name. It is like fire, it blisters me. . . .

"Others cast me off, you remained true, you who had good cause to hate me eternally. . . . you *would not* lose faith in me. . . . if you had, God alone knows what would have become of me. . . . I said I should tell *all*. I lied. I shall tell nothing. O Francisca, Francisca, my soul wouldn't be worth a brass farthing if I injured a hair of your head. . . ."

Francisca swayed to and fro in her seat, then she slid onto the floor and prayed, weeping, weeping.

Francisca sat alone among the rocks in a solitary and savage glen below the Château St. Fond. The spring sun was in her eyes, and they were sad. A copy of the *Evening Ensign*, some days old, was on her lap, and among its always excellent leader-ettes were two that were really one, and she had just read them. Thus they ran:

"The old adage that truth is stranger than fiction received another illustration yesterday in a case that came on for hearing at the Assizes now being held at Luncheon. This was the trial of Philip Tuer, charged on his own confession with waylaying David Reed, a bank clerk, and robbing him of jewels valued at

eight or nine thousand pounds, the property of the Countess of Eden. The case, which possesses several features of unusual interest, has created considerable excitement throughout the county, the approaches to the Court-house being, as our correspondent says, 'completely blocked from an early hour by a large and excited crowd eager to obtain admittance.' It will be in the memory of many of our readers that nearly eleven years ago a daring and successful robbery took place in the neighborhood of Fellby, when Reed, an old and trusted clerk in the Fellby Bank, was waylaid, drugged, and robbed when on his way from Stramon Court, the seat of Lord Eden, to deposit the jewels of Lady Eden in the bank vault where it was customary to keep them. At the time suspicion fell heavily upon Reed himself, nor did a minute investigation result in dissipating it; and it is said that he would undoubtedly have been prosecuted but for the good offices of the Countess, whose exalted character is so well known, and who refused to believe in Reed's guilt. This magnanimous and characteristic conduct on her part has now been amply justified by the confession of the real culprit, who turns out to be none other than Reed's son-in-law.

"It is extremely sad to relate that the prisoner, Philip Tuer, is an Oxford man, a gentleman by birth, and the youngest son of Mr. Percy Tuer, J.P., D.L., a man of old blood and high character, and who, it will be remembered, declined to accept a knighthood two years ago. Great sympathy is felt for the family thus disgraced by one of its members, who had, we understand, already cut himself off from all connection with it by his unfortunate marriage. The motives for this late confession, though obscure, are no doubt commendable, and the prisoner has manifested an unlooked-for degree of manliness in coming forward to clear the blighted reputation of an innocent and injured man, between whom and himself it is said no love has been lost. The reception of Mr. Reed on his return to Fellby was, we are told, 'one of the finest and most moving events recorded in the long history of Fellby. The people wove garlands, rang bells, lit bonfires, killed and ate beeves, broached and drank many hogs-heads of beer, and cheered the old man till the welkin rang.' The judge, who was greatly affected, sentenced the prisoner to five years' imprisonment."

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The good ship *Australasia*, 4200 tons, Commander John Flint, flying the Union-jack a few hours earlier, and bound from San Francisco to Sydney, was twelve hours out from port, and going through the water at seventeen knots an hour. After the land heat the soft night breeze was just chilly enough to warrant any lady on deck, especially if she was not promenading, in wearing the most picturesque and comfortable garment at her command. The sky was beginning to speck itself with brilliant points, while an upper light lingered bewitchingly in the air, the disembodied spirit of the day that was dead. The upper deck was well sprinkled with promenaders, a few single, but mostly in couples; and these, as usual, divided and united by the fascination of sex. At present all was tentative in combination, and subject to a selective principle that had not, as yet, had time or opportunity to verify its instincts. Among the passengers, though not on the printed list, was that well-known traveller, that senior-junior, giant-dwarf, Dan Cupid, ready as ever to lend a hand in that best of all comedies, Courtship and Love-making in the lap of Neptune.

On the starboard side, the doctor was—doing his duty, while Dan grinned. We will let him pass. After him at an interval came the purser, who also was doing his duty. But him we may not let pass, if only for the sake of the tall and graceful young lady to whom he has so thoughtfully offered the support of his arm, and towards whom he bows and sways with instinctive gallantry, with an air of breeding that should have added, though it did not, an extra five pounds a month to his pay. She was an English girl to the tips of her fingers, with the stamp of race on every feature as plainly visible as the mark of fashion on her clothes. Exceedingly lovely, with a voice whose sweet accents were, to the ear attuned, as a strain of beloved music, and with all the notes upon her of a gracious and exquisite womanliness, she was a girl that your globe-trotting Briton likes to come across on his travels. He can look at her, and then look the world in the face and hum “Rule Britannia.”

On the port side aft, leaning against the deck rail, stood a lady of distinguished appearance, and unmistakably beautiful. Her air of distinction attracted general attention, and it was noticed that the captain found her society agreeable. More than one gentleman offered his services for a promenade, without success, indeed, but with the ample reward of a rare smile and an expression of

thanks that seemed like a favor conferred. She was an Englishwoman, of course, and mother of that magnificent girl that the confounded purser had snapped up. Her name? The list said, "Mrs. Bucer," "Miss Muriel Bucer." That was nothing. Each lady had a maid with her on board, and it was rumored that one of them had told a stewardess, and the other had not denied it, that her mistress was—at this point Rumor gave herself away, as she is apt to, and showed her marvellous mouth wherein are many tongues. A great singer, a famous actress, a high-born nihilist, a millionaire, a countess, a duchess, and last, but not least, the wife of the Lord Mayor of London, travelling *incognita*.

A fine-looking man with a military air exclaimed, "If she's a nihilist, I'm another."

Though what he meant, I do not know. Many similar observations were made.

Meanwhile my Lady Incognita amused herself with watching the phosphorescent jewelling of the waters, and the passing and repassing of her daughter in company with dutiful Mr. Purser. Presently they halted on a line with her, then they advanced across the deck towards her, and as Mr. Purser saluted his charge and left her, my Lady Incognita caught his profile, and made a quick step forward. He was gone.

"How very foolish of me! It was so like him, though," was her thought.

Then to her fawn-like daughter, "Well, dear, have you enjoyed you walk?"

"Very much, indeed, my dearest. He is such a nice man," murmured Miss Britannia, linking her arm through her mother's and moving along the deck.

"I am glad to hear it. He looks so. Who is he?"

"He is the purser."

"You don't know his name?"

"No, I have not the slightest idea. I suppose he has a name, though."

"It is to be hoped so, poor man. You will find it here, probably. Can you read by this light?"

The girl took the list, and with some difficulty made out, "Purser, John Smith." She laughed.

"We know his family now, dearest, at any rate."

"Perhaps, like ourselves, Muriel, he prefers to travel *incognito*."

Again the girl laughed—and every laugh of every such girl ought to be chronicled.

“What a delightful idea! Perhaps a prince in disguise, a Peter the Great playing purser. But, really, he is a nice man. A gentleman, I am sure.”

“Has he been long—what he is now?”

“This is only his third voyage, he said. I asked him if he was an Englishman, but he evaded the question. I don’t know why, but he made me sad. I think he must have had a strange and sad history.”

“Possibly, dear. I always think that the one romantic character on a ship is the purser. All the other officers represent dull routine, but the purser might have been anything, everything. I will have a chat with him to-morrow.”

On the morrow, however, the purser did not make his appearance on deck or below. Breakfast, lunch, dinner found his seat at table vacant. This was the case for three days in succession.

“What has become of Mr. Purser?” inquired my Lady Incognita of the captain, on whose right she sat.

“I’m sure I don’t know. He is seldom absent from meals.”

“Sea-sick,” suggested Miss Britannia from the captain’s left.

He laughed.

“No. A landsman all over, yet not a bad sailor. I saw him this morning early on deck. Getting through his work earlier than usual, I guess.”

On the following day there was a bit of a sea on, just enough to serve as a pretext for keeping to her cabin all day, of which my Lady Incognita availed herself. Lo and behold! on that day the erratic Mr. Purser reappeared on deck, and to the mortification of sundry masculine minds appropriated Miss Britannia altogether to himself. On the next day my Lady Incognita spent most of her time on deck, but Mr. Purser had again rendered himself invisible. The lady was not piqued. Piqued? Is a hurricane a mere fitful breeze that works itself at intervals into momentary gusts, sharp and passionate? She thought of his profile, and her whole nature was shaken as by a furious tempest.

Sunday morning came: he was sure to be at service, she thought; for if the doctor and the purser failed, where would be the righteousness of any ship’s officers? She was right. He was there. But not near the piano, musical, nor near the preacher, official,

but behind her, away at the far end of the saloon, with only his left shoulder showing from behind a pillar. She changed her seat: he must have moved his position, for when she glanced at him she beheld his right arm, nothing more. Then for the first time did she realize how strangely featureless are most of our features. There was a whole right arm before her eyes, yet, scan it as she would, for the life of her she could not tell whether or not it was *his arm*.

Eight bells sounded—midnight. She was sitting in her stateroom, dressed, muffled in furs, listening. There was a piping of the bo'sn's whistle, followed by the swarming of sailors and the usual rattle. Silence. Would he not come to-night? Did he know? Listen! Tramp, tramp, tramp, tramp—a solitary promenader on deck. The arm might be mute, but the step eloquent. It was that step that had let loose the tempest in her heart. Gathering her robes about her, she passed quickly out and up the companion-way, onto the deck. A dying moon was climbing hard up the steep sides of heaven. It was on the port side, so was he, at the far end of the deck. She came out when he was too near to retreat.

“A beautiful night, Mr. Purser.”

“Very, madam. They are going to swab the deck.”

Stiffly, and with his voice in his throat, he spoke, saluted her, and passed on.

She put out her hand, touched his arm, and said, “Philip, Philip!”

“Ha! then it is no use. Francisca, I hoped you wouldn't, I prayed you wouldn't. This is an unfortunate meeting. Yet—”

He held her hand tightly, and she made no movement to release it.

“Don't say that. You don't know how glad I am.”

“You forget. A convicted felon.”

He dropped her hand suddenly.

“Give me your arm, Philip, and let us walk.”

He obeyed.

“I knew you were—”

“Released before my time?”

“I did all I could to—”

“Ah! I guessed as much. It was like you. I said to myself, ‘She won't forget me or forsake me.’”

“Thank you,” she gasped, and the next moment a great sob

broke from her, and Philip Tuer started and trembled. It was like a flash of lightning through his soul.

"I suppose you know that Janet is dead?" he said, after an interval.

"Yes. The Earl also."

"Your husband? Dead?"

"Yes, over a year."

Neither spoke for a long time.

"What brings you here?" he asked, and he covered the hand that rested on his arm with his own.

"I came to the States because—well, I thought I should like to. I had promised Mrs. Cowp that I would cross some day, and stay with her and her husband at Rhode Island."

"Yes, yes. That is Margaret?" he said, with some eagerness.

"Yes. She is very happy. Has a boy and a girl. The girl is named Francisca."

"Ha! then God will bless the child! What about her husband and the packet I sent for him?"

"I did as you wished me. I gave him the package on his wedding-day. Three months after, he came to Stramon Court with his bride. He spoke to me about it. He almost cried for joy. He told me all about it. 'But I shall not change my name now,' he said. 'And as for Abbot's Hey, that will be Margaret's some day, which will be just the same as if I had it.' He acted very nicely, I think."

"The old folk?"

"They were all well and happy the last I heard of them. Mr. Oldcastle has given himself over to breeding wonderful shire horses. He is doing great things, I hear. I like that man immensely. He is a sound man from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. He kissed my hand the last time I saw him, and I felt like kissing his cheek. A sweet-natured man."

"Did Margaret, or any of them, learn—anything?"

"No, not a word. They wonder to this day what it all meant, and what became of you. But there, I am tired of it all. Tell me something of yourself, Philip."

"Well, yes, I have much I should like to tell you. To begin with—they are going to swab the deck, confound them!"

Thenceforward Mr. Purser was much on deck, and divided his whole time between my Lady Incognita and Miss Britannia. The

fine-looking man with a military air made another observation: "Some fellows are no fools. Freshness has its charms, but for rapture, give me mellow ripeness." What he meant was a riddle without a clew, though his eyes wandered from daughter to mother and lingered on the latter as he spoke.

A fortnight later Francisca and Tuer were leaning on the taff-rail, their eyes on the churning water below them. The deck swarmed with people gay to excitement, for port was within the morning's revelation. It was evening now.

"You don't mean it, Francisca?"

"Why not? I can trust you, Philip. And if I couldn't, I should still love you, Philip. And our Muriel, too, stands ready to give you a daughter's love worth having."

"Oh, my God, if I were only worthy!"

"You love me, dearest."

Their eyes met.

"You have saved my soul alive, my angel—my—my own sweet—wife!"

THE END.

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
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
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
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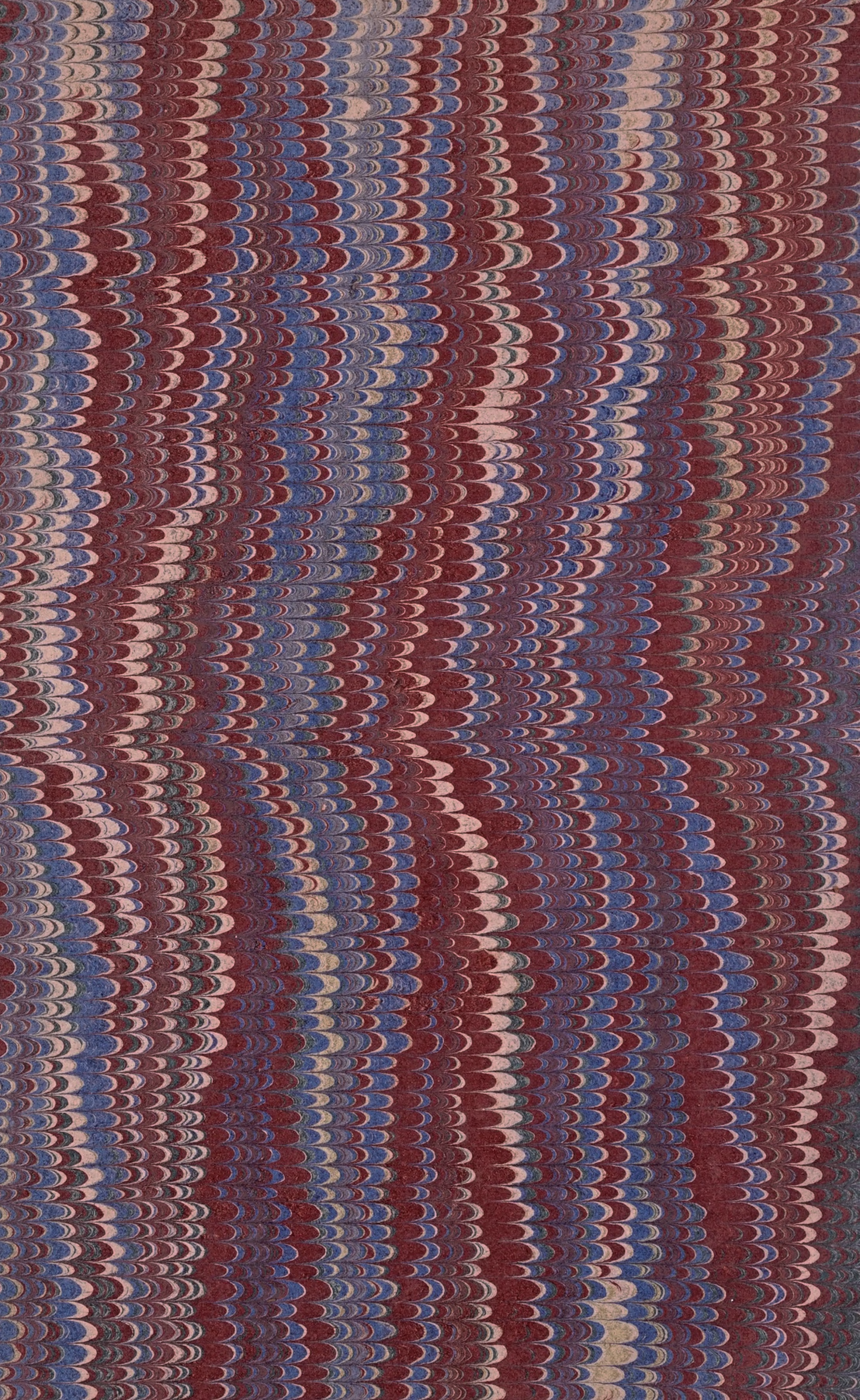
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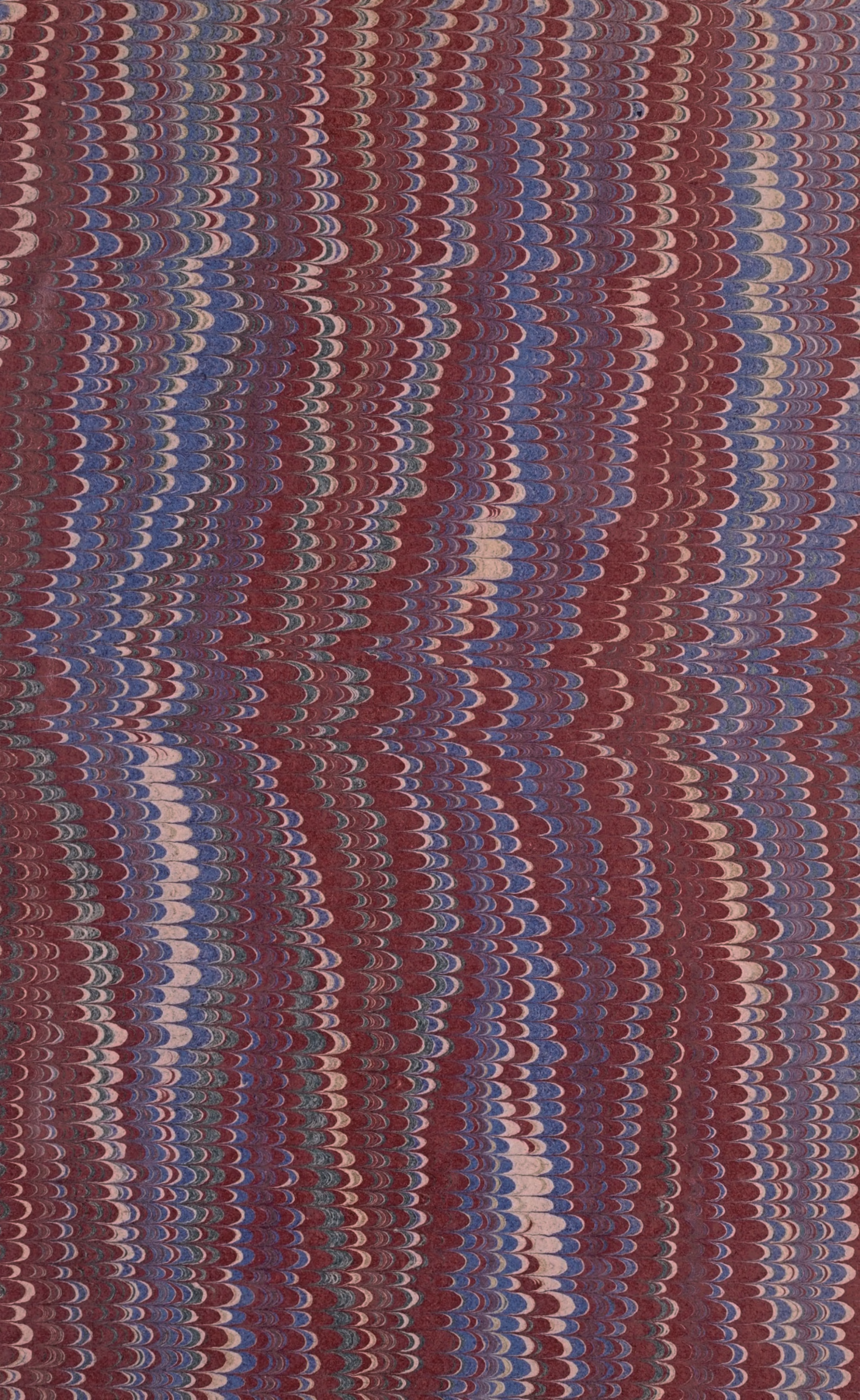
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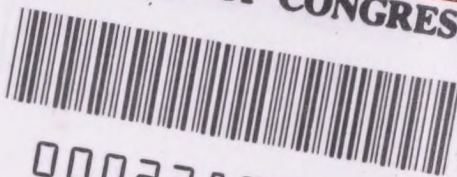
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